A Special Issue on California's Heartland

california JOURNAL

JUNE 1999
$3.95
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THE CENTRAL VALLEY

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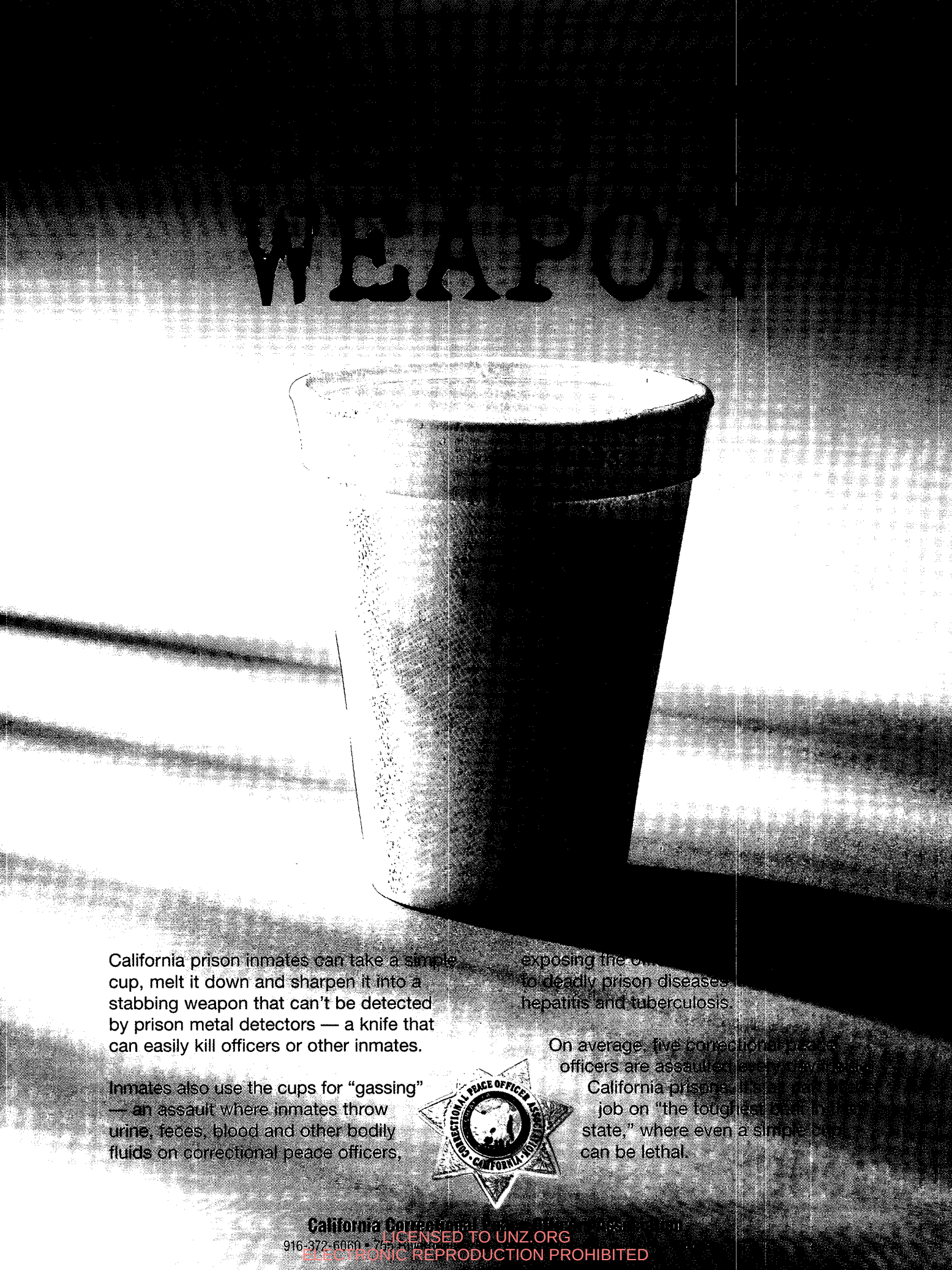
WEAPON



California prison inmates can take a simple cup, melt it down and sharpen it into a stabbing weapon that can't be detected by prison metal detectors — a knife that can easily kill officers or other inmates.

Inmates also use the cups for "gassing" — an assault where inmates throw urine, feces, blood and other bodily fluids on correctional peace officers, exposing the [illegible] to deadly prison diseases, hepatitis and tuberculosis.

On average, five correctional peace officers are assaulted [illegible] California prisons. It's a dangerous job on "the toughest beat in the state," where even a simple cup can be lethal.

California Correctional [illegible]
916-372-6060 • [illegible]

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California JOURNAL
June 1999
Volume XXX, Number 6

Upfront

Talking Points

Two Cents

Southern Exposure

By the Numbers

The next battleground

By Cynthia H. Craft

Since last year, when Associate Editor Noel Brinkerhoff first suggested we produce a special issue of the *California Journal* on the Central Valley, the notion has grown only more timely.

Consider: Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante, this century's first Latino politician elected statewide, hails from the Valley; the first University of California campus to be built from scratch in 30 years will take root in the Valley; population projections indicate the vast majority of California's newcomers will settle in the Valley over the next 40 years; battles over water will take shape with the Valley as ground zero.

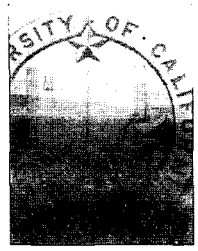
Growth inevitably will bulge inward from our coastal cities. Already the Building Industry Association has targeted the region for its next major surge in home building, and this, of course, has sparked an equal but opposite reaction from planners and preservationists.

Suffice it to say that guiding lights such as the Great Valley Center, a growth-planning non-profit organization funded by large foundations, will have hands full as it attempts to chart a course into the next century. We hope our Central Valley special issue assists in bringing to light some of the challenges.

Era of the Central Valley
Take a good, long look around California's Central Valley. You'll see plenty of signs of a place in transition — and plenty of uncertainty about what is to come.
By Peter H. King

Politics of the Valley
Tinged with many of the political characteristics of the Deep South, the Central Valley balances conservativism with pragmatism — against the backdrop of dramatically changing demographics.
By Steve Scott

Building a major university
With heavy political clout weighing in behind it, the proposed UC-Merced campus will likely sail over environmental and regulatory hurdles.
By Bill Fulton and Paul Shigley



Small farm network
Advocates in the Central Valley help small family farms survive and thrive in the face of development and other economic pressures.
By Cynthia H. Craft

Migrant Mother's legacy
Dorothea Lange's famous photograph leaves lasting impressions for viewers — and in the lives of the family Lange's lens captured.
By Claudia Buck

Voices of the Valley
Hear the voices of a sampling of key decision-makers as they tell of the complex, often competing, problems confronting Central Valley growth.
By Kathleen Les

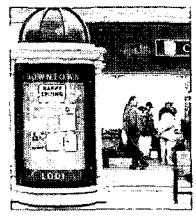


Illustration by Meg McAneny

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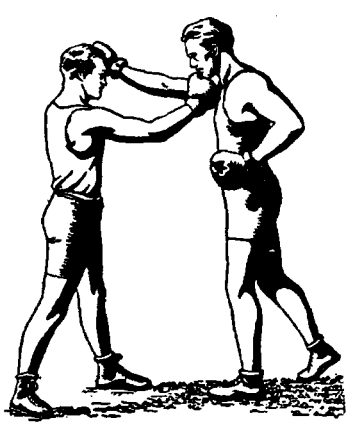
Split personalities. Because of the public nature of their jobs, politicians' individual personalities often become the benchmarks by which they are judged by the media and by their constituents. But human beings are complicated creatures, especially those who subject themselves to the sometimes humbling ordeal of electoral politics. Recently, two of the Legislature's "characters" demonstrated that there is more to them than meets the eye. GOP Assemblyman Brett Granlund (R-Yucaipa) is generally seen as something of a laconic wiseacre in floor speeches and general demeanor. But during a lengthy floor discussion of a resolution concerning the Littleton, Colorado, school massacre, it was Granlund alone who saw the lines being drawn in the mind of one of his colleagues. In his floor speech, Granlund acknowledged the still-fresh wounds felt by Assemblyman Mike Machado (D-Stockton), whose own 18-year-old son died last year in a farming accident. After his remarks, Granlund walked over to a solemn Machado and gave him an understanding clasp on the shoulder. Even more striking that same day was the side shown by Assemblyman Richard Floyd (D-Carson). Defiantly coarse and cynical in most every circumstance, Floyd turned into the Assembly's honorary grandpa during the session, which was held on "Bring Your Daughters To Work Day." Floyd's desk was the gathering place for many of the girls who'd come to visit the chambers, and his desk was literally overflowing with small beanie-baby stuffed animals. Floyd showed yet another side later on, during debate over legislation to limit gun sales. A Korean War veteran, Floyd described to a hushed chamber how the Colorado shootings had stoked memories of the stench of death he'd experienced as a soldier — memories so vivid he actually smelled it again after watching television coverage of the shooting. "Once you smell that smell, you don't forget it." Those present will probably remember Floyd's speech as well, and probably won't look at him quite the same way.

Creative license. We understand how hard it is for legislative staff to be both clever and pointed when describing the impact of a particular bill. Few great novelists have emerged from the ranks of those who write legislative bill analyses. But Roger Magyar, who counsels Republicans assigned to the Assembly Education Committee has to win some kind of prize for creativity. Magyar is listed as the author of an analysis urging Republicans to oppose AB 1031 because it lets the state rummage around in what the GOP considers a local arena, and because it carries an annual $30 million price tag. So it was only natural that Magyar begins his analysis of AB 1031 thusly: "An exciting, satisfying love life is an important attribute of a successful marriage, but no one should assume that a homeowners' association is much good at helping its residents create one." Any notion what the bill seeks to accomplish? If you guessed "[financial] grants to support

Friendly fire.

Deciding whether to pursue the state's effort to enforce the hot-button 1994 immigration initiative, Proposition 187, didn't figure to be easy for Governor Gray Davis, who opposed the measure. But he probably didn't expect to have his attempted middle-ground solution spark so nasty a public spat with Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante. Bustamante was out of the loop when Davis made the call to try to seek a mediated solution to the appeal – one which, presumably, Davis could use to buttress his promise to obey "the will of the people." Bustmante's response was to publicly denounce the governor's decision. Over the next three weeks, the two principals' seconds sniped at each other like a collection of soap-opera queens. The feud reached its nadir when Davis' office snatched back nine prime parking spaces in the State Capitol garage it had loaned to Bustamante and his staff. Finally, at Bustamante's instigation, the two "took a meeting" to air their grievances. After the confab, Bustamante issued a news release praising Davis for a recent decision to overturn a Wilson-era decision affecting health care for Latinas. Bustamante added that he and Davis had essentially agreed to disagree on Davis' action regarding the appeal of Proposition 187. The disrespect Davis showed Bustamante isn't all that unusual – governors have been ignoring lieutenant governors for a long time. But there is a special irony in Davis trying to job Bustamante out of some Capitol perks. Does anybody remember the name of the last lieutenant governor to have a governor try to strip away some state Capitol privileges? We'll give you a hint – his first name rhymes with "clay."



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CALIFORNIA JOURNAL is a monthly, non-partisan, non-ideological analysis of California government and politics established in 1970. The Journal is available on-line through StateNet, Nexis/Lexis and Westlaw. It is indexed in Public Affairs Information Service, New York Times Information Bank, Sage Urban Studies Abstracts and Urban Affairs Abstracts. California Journal (ISSN 0008-1205) is published monthly. Subscription rates: Libraries and Government Agencies, $59.00; Corporations and Associations, $95.00; Special Individual rate, $42.00. Address all inquiries to California Journal, 2101 K Street, Sacramento, CA 95816. Telephone (916) 444-2840. Copyright 1998 by Information for Public Affairs, Inc. Periodicals postage paid at Sacramento. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CALIFORNIA JOURNAL, 2101 K Street, Sacramento, CA 95816.

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youth-to-youth peer programs in public schools," you win a session with the therapist of your choice.

Lessons of history. High on the list of motheaten political cliches is this one: Those who do not study the lessons of history are doomed to repeat it. But there's a less well-known saw that goes something like this: Those who *do* study the gimmicks of history are doomed to repeat them. Consider the case of State Controller Kathleen Connell. Last month, paychecks issued to state workers were accompanied by a little note: "State Controller Kathleen Connell has increased your April pay to reflect a permanent 5.5 percent base pay increase effective April 1. Of course, the pay raise was really negotiated by the Davis administration and approved by the state Legislature. Connell's involvement consisted of signing her name clearly enough so that an imprint of her signature could be made. It's as if the mailman took your tax refund and wrote in the margins "The U.S. Postal Service has paid you back for the extra taxes it turns out you didn't owe." Of course, the guv has little cause to complain about Connell's grandstand play. In 1987, when the state returned about $1 billion to taxpayers, each rebate check was accompanied by a nice little note from then-Controller Gray Davis.

Gimmickpalooza. Giving credit where credit is due, we tip our hats to Beth Miller and Alfie Charles, press officers for Secretary of State (and Central Valley native) Bill Jones. Their boss is cosponsoring legislation aimed at eliminating the gifts-for-voting practice in special elections. The catalyst was the controversial chicken dinner giveaway in the special-election primary earlier this year in Oakland. The raw material was there, and Miller and Charles ran with it. The advisory announcing a news conference on the bill enticed reporters "cooped up" in their offices to "Bawk on over" to the event. Attached to the advisory was a single blue "Peep," those sugar-coated Easter marshmallow balls shaped like chickens. Those who were enticed by the gag found more waiting at the news conference itself. Jones' handlers lined up a cast that included Green Party Assemblywoman Audie Bock, who won the Oakland contest. Those who brought the advisory received a "free gift" — some leftover Easter candy. And if that wasn't enough, journalists were also treated to a visit from a man in a chicken costume. They even got the chance to zing the Democrats' political pitbull, Bob Mulholland. When Mulholland, a veteran gimmickmeister, gave Jones flak, Miller responded with a backhanded compliment: "We just asked ourselves, 'What would Bob do?'"

Fallback strategy. Is Assembly Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa (D-Los Angeles) getting a bout of cold feet? Villaraigosa had been considered a lead-pipe cinch to run for mayor of Los Angeles in 2001. But last month, the buzz began filtering that the speaker might instead be thinking about a run for the Los Angeles City Council seat held by incumbent Jackie Goldberg. Fuel was added to this speculation early last month when Villaraigosa revealed he would endorse Goldberg's candidacy for his assembly seat next year. That latter tidbit also brings a touch of irony. In 1994, then-Assemblyman Richard Polanco tried to pass his heavily Latino seat off to a non-Latino, his chief legislative aide Bill Mabie. Mabie, however, was dumped in the Democratic primary by a snappily dressed upstart who eventually became speaker. His name? Now let's not always see the same hands.

"He who frames the argument often wins it."
— George W

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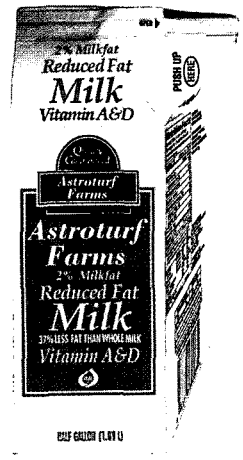
Follow the Money:

Moo Juice

If the late Assembly Speaker **Jesse Unruh** had been hanging around the state Senate last month, he might have amended his now-universal bromide about the influence of money. For one brief shining moment, anyway, money was the *cow's* milk of politics.

In this year's marquee battle of the special interest bands, out-of-state milk producers went to war with those within California over whether to change laws restricting pricing and nutritional content of milk. Two bills making specific changes in those laws became the center of a months-long public relations war in which both sides covered their economic interests with "astroturf," the term describing those nice-sounding "grassroots" organizations that are really just glorified P.R. fronts.



Californians for Nutritious Milk, the "consumer" group defending California's stricter nutritional and milk-solid content standards, had under its rug **The Dolphin Group**, a public relations and lobbying powerhouse. Also there was primo Sacramento lobbying firm **Lang, Hansen, O'Malley and Miller**. With the funding coming from the state's producers and processors, their interest was in maintaining the substantial competitive advantage enjoyed by the state's own dairy industry.

For their campaign, Mad About Milk, the Davids supposedly battling the monopolistic Goliath of the state's vertically integrated dairy industry had enough stones in their slingshot to hire veteran Sacramento lobbying firm **Kahl/Pownall** as well as Burlingame-based P.R. big shots **Woodward-McDowell.** The roots of their "grassroots" led straight to Arizona dairy giant Shamrock Foods, whose primary economic interest lay in establishing market share in the lucrative California market without tooling up their processing facilities.

When the bills themselves were heard before the state Senate's Agriculture and Water Committee, even Capitol vets marveled at the spectacle. There were lobbyists defending the sanctity of California's nutritional standards whose companies had, in other circumstances, defended the interests of such health-conscious firms as Philip Morris, and R.J. Reynolds. On the other side, lobbying against the monopolistic control large retailers have over milk processing were individuals whose firms also work the halls for that other bastion of competitive free enterprise, the oil industry.

The bills themselves, and their sound defeat, seemed almost anticlimactic. The measure sponsored by Shamrock Foods to allow the sale of Arizona-grade milk in California got only the vote of its author, state Senator **Debra Bowen** (D-Marina del Rey). State Senator **Jackie Speier's** (D-Daly City) bill to allow retailers to sell milk below cost didn't fare much better, though a watered-down version did limp out a few weeks later. But both Bowen and Speier are mulling legislation that would take more direct aim at the vertical integration that allows large supermarkets to maintain control over milk processing, and therefore pricing.

Looks like astroturf will be mixed in with those dairy cuds for some time to come.

— Steve Scott

Quotables.....

"In the summertime, one of the lanes of Route 99, the valley's major north-south freeway, will be red from all of the tomatoes that fall off the tractor-trailer rigs."

— Fresno County Supervisor Juan Arambula, quoted in the National Journal likening the San Joaquin Valley to "a Third World country that exports its raw natural products to be refined elsewhere and have the earnings accrue to someone else."

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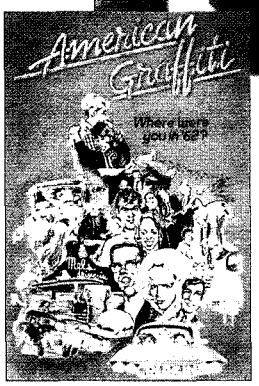
Appreciation:

"American Graffiti:" Everywhere, USA



Even as far away as the lush farm towns of the Midwest, Main Street on Saturday night throbbed with hot rod cars and the pulse of rock-'n'-roll music. "Cruising" had captured hundreds of towns and cities across America.

Cruising was a dominant teenage social activity and the centerpiece for the 1973 film, born of the Central Valley, "American Graffiti." Although set in Modesto, "American Graffiti" could have been about any town or small city in America and, as such, it connected this state with the rest of the country as did few other movies about California.

To a large extent, California's image has been crafted through films, from older classics such as "San Francisco," "The Grapes of Wrath" and "East of Eden" to "Dirty Harry," "LA Confidential" and "The Player" — even the giddy beach party series. For the most part, they helped define California as set apart, slightly kooky, forever on edge.

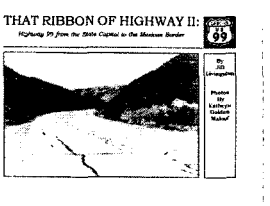
"American Graffiti" was unique in this regard because it showed a slice of California that was Everywhere, USA. As such, it resonated with audiences all over the country, a popularity that resurged in 1998 when the film was re-released for its 25th anniversary.

The driving spirit behind "American Graffiti" was director **George Lucas,** a Modesto native who has become one of the most successful filmmakers of all time thanks to another of his concoctions — "Star Wars." Lucas shaped both "American Graffiti" and "Star Wars," but the forces that shaped Lucas were those of the Central Valley.

— A.G. Block

Excerpts: From the Bookshelf

Get Your Kicks on Route 99



That Ribbon of Highway II: Highway 99 from the State Capital to the Mexican Border
By Jill Livingston

This pocket-sized sequel to "That Ribbon of Highway: Highway 99 from the Oregon Border to the State Capital" continues the author's sentimental journey down the earliest version of the landmark route that traverses the Central Valley and beyond. This roadway, in some places reminiscent of an era when touring by motorcar was a Sunday leisure activity, "attests to the time in our past when getting from one place to the next was a journey to be enjoyed," says Livingston. True to her purpose, the author steers readers along the path of the old, concrete-paved 99 that was first poured in the 1910s. There were basically three versions of the highway: the narrow strip of the 1910s, the two and three-lane version of the 1920s to 1940s and the four-lane expressway of the 1950s that then matured into today's freeway. If an adventure in vintage charm and quirkiness is what you seek, this regional history and guide book will provide it — maps and all.

— Cynthia H. Craft

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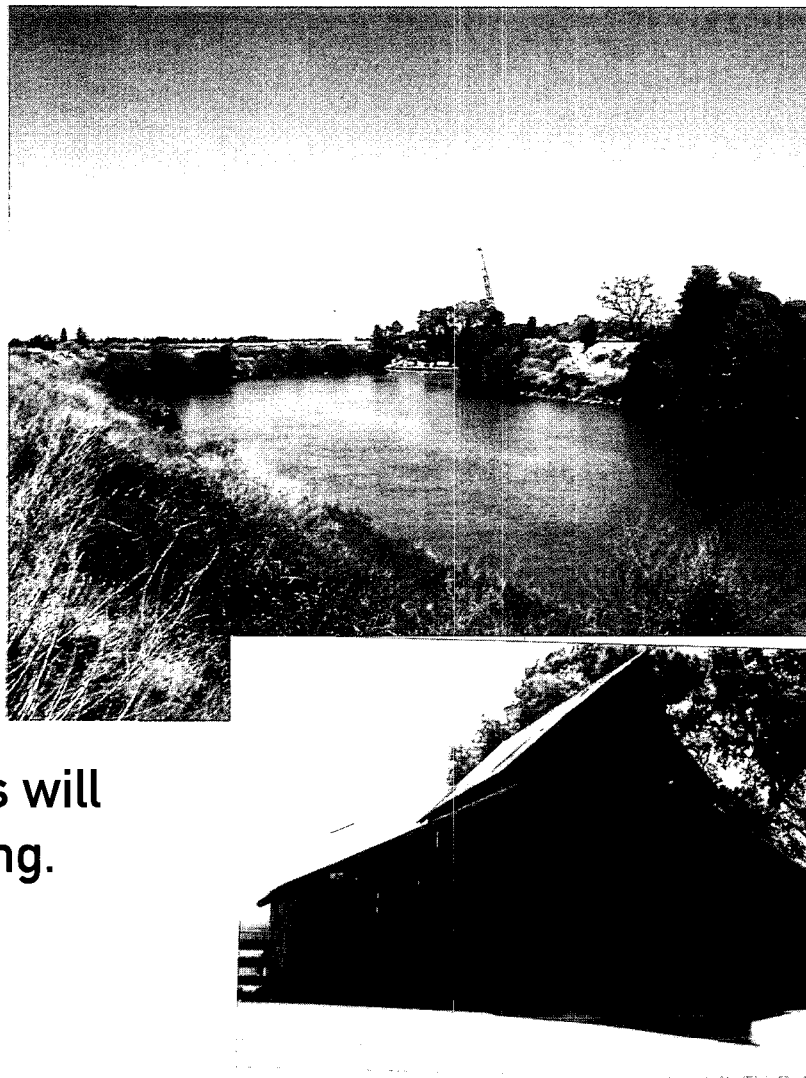
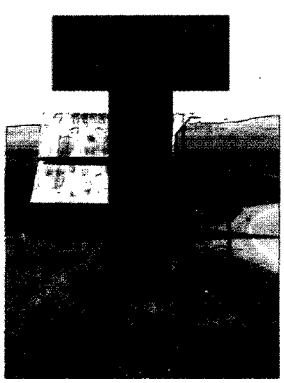
It has been called by many names, some of them quite grand. The Great Central Valley. The California Plain. The Serengeti of North America. The California Heartland. The Twin Valleys. The Other California. To those of us who grew up here, though, it's just the valley, a word residents sometimes will pronounce with a mock twang.



By Peter H. King

HIGHWAY 99, north of Madera.



ake a seat at one of the picnic tables outside the Mammoth Orange — last of the 1950s-era hamburger stands that were built and painted to resemble giant oranges, home of "Alaska-sized" burgers and "Fat John" hot dogs, and a valley icon if there ever was one — and watch the trucks blast by on Highway 99. The trucks tell a story about a place in transition.

There goes a big rig pulling grain trailers, followed by a cattle carrier, followed by a Foster Farms semi and now a hay truck — valley agriculture on the move, feeding the nation, making the desert bloom, and all that. And here comes a flatbed loaded with two-by-fours, and another with bags of concrete mix, and an entire convoy of Wal-Mart semis, rushing to fill the big box stores that seem to be

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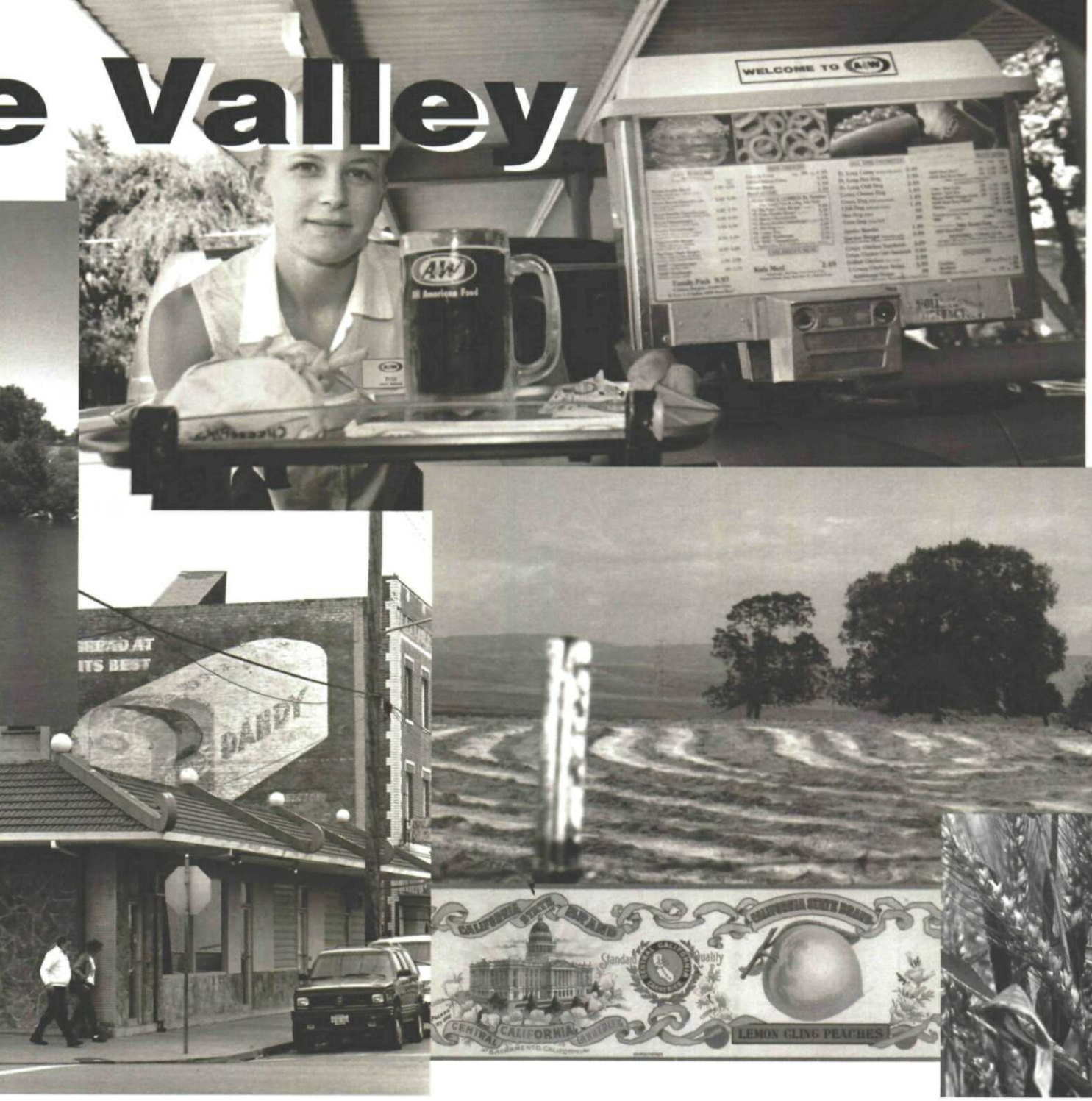

going up in the towns strung along this highway as fast as the new subdivisions they mean to serve.

Which is to say, quite fast.

The Valley is changing, but then it always has been. The towns along Highway 99 — technically, it's a freeway now, another change — can document the past as well as forecast the future. Anyone who wants to know what Fresno was like, say, a generation or two ago, need only drive 30 miles south and take the exit into Visalia. The future of Madera can be seen today in Merced, which before too long will grow to look a lot like Modesto.

Once, back in the time of the Gold Rush, the valley grew cattle. Then it was wheat. Then grapes and figs and cotton and all the other crops that make it, still today, the most productive agricultural region in the world. Now, though, more and more it also grows housing tracts, often named to honor the farms and ranches they displace. The valley's population of five million is expected to triple in the next 40 years — that's a lot of two-by-fours, many Wal-Marts. Given these trends, the valley has begun to produce a new crop: Reports and studies and conferences and journalism, vast piles of paper, long sessions of worried talk, all aimed from various angles at the question of what all this growth will mean to this place. Here's one more for the pile.

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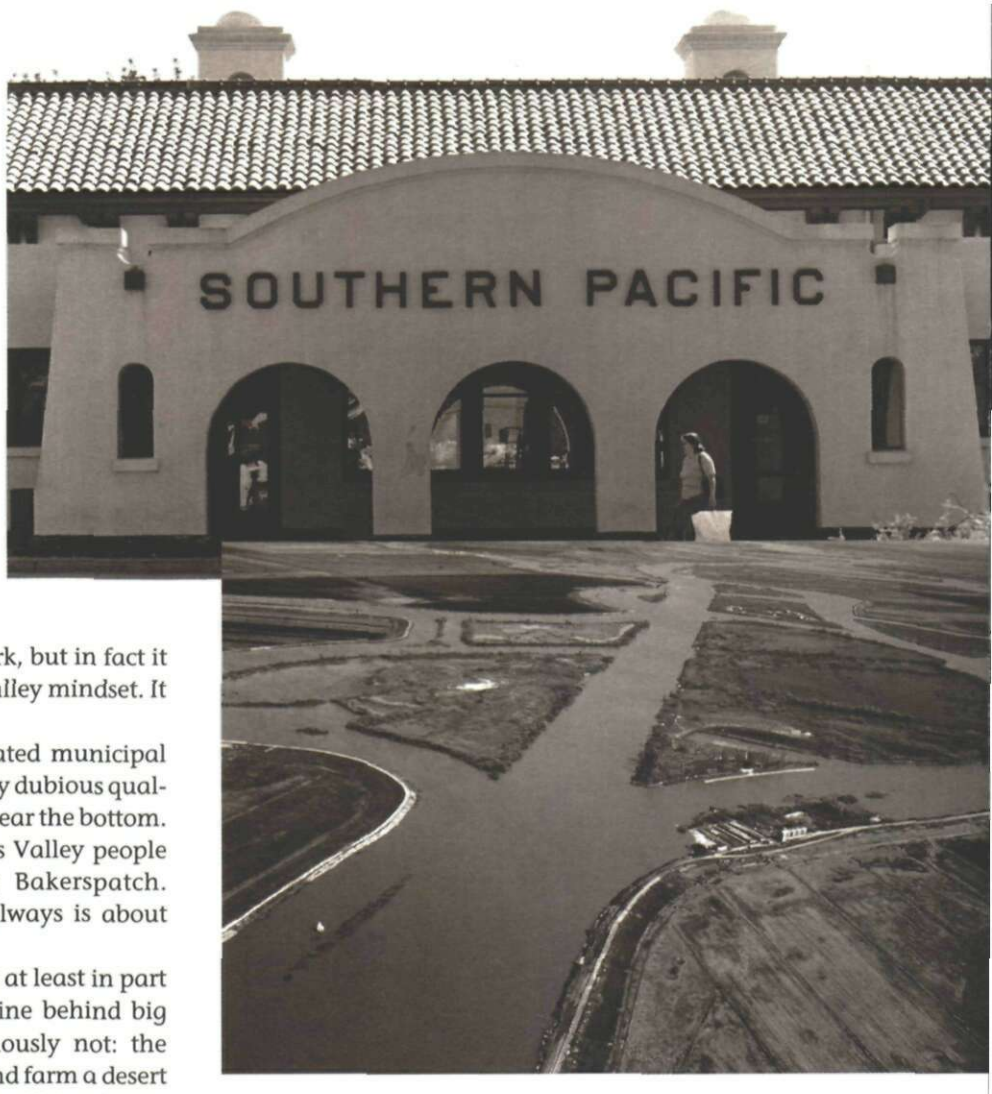

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The intent is comic self-deprecation, the valley's common defense against the snobberies, both imagined and real, of coastal Californians who live across the passes in the more fabled cities of the gilded land. This insecurity might seem a trifling point, a cultural quirk, but in fact it is an important element of the collective valley mindset. It explains many things.

It explains, for example, the overheated municipal reaction whenever one of those scientifically dubious quality-of-life lists dares to rank a Valley town near the bottom. It explains as well some of the nicknames Valley people will hang on their own hometowns: Bakerspatch. Sacratomato. P-ville. Fresburg; humor always is about more than laughs.

More importantly, though, it explains at least in part the Valley's historic readiness to fall in line behind big dreamers, some successful, others infamously not: the agricultural pioneers who would irrigate and farm a desert or hook the world on raisins; the shopping mall developers who promise Nordstroms but deliver Targets; the field-of-dreams merchants who would scatter ballparks — *yes, minor league now, but you never know...* — from Bakersfield to Redding. Anyone with an idea for how to put the valley "on the map" always will be assured an attentive audience.

In truth, the Valley as a whole never has quite known what to make of itself. Many of its towns are too big to be called towns, but are not quite cities, either. They seem caught in a sort of gangling adolescence. Their newspapers dig up big-city scandals and cover urban crime, but they also feature the pound's "Dog-of-the-week." Agriculture is everywhere — except within the ever-expanding suburbs, where it is nowhere.

As with almost every noteworthy facet of this part of the world, the late William Saroyan already has written about the Valley's struggle with its identity, and written about it with a clarity that still endures more than a half-century later. In a story published in 1934, Saroyan wrote this about his native Fresno:

Two miles from the heart of our city a man could come to the desert and feel the loneliness of a desolate area, a place lost in the earth, far from the solace of human thought. Standing at the edge of our city, a man could feel that we had made this place of streets and dwellings in the stillness and loneliness of the desert, and that we had done a brave thing. We had come to this dry area that was without history, and we had paused in it and built our houses and we were slowly creating the legend of our life. We were digging for water and we were leading streams through the dry land. We were planting and ploughing and standing in the midst of the garden we were making.

... We had buried no great men because we hadn't had time to produce any great men. We had been too busy trying to get water into the desert. The shadow of no great mind was over our city. But we had a playground called Cosmos Playground. We had public schools named after Emerson and Hawthorne and Lowell and Longfellow. Two great railways had their lines running through our city.... A man could feel our city was beautiful. Or a man could feel that our city was fake, that our lives were empty, and that we were the contemporaries of jackrabbits. Or a man could have one viewpoint in the morning and another in the evening.

□□□

An ancient seabed, the Valley actually consists of two valleys, one drained by the Sacramento River, the other by the San Joaquin. For that matter, the Tulare Lake Basin in the Valley's southern third also qualifies as a separate geographical entity. Such distinctions, however, have been rendered moot in the past century by the massive replumbing of the Valley's natural waterworks, along with the wholesale land-leveling done by agriculture's scrapers.

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Increasingly, it has become what the satellite photographs and the utilitarian phrase "Central Valley" suggest: A singular region, a common place, a great trough of cultivated land and emerging townscapes running down the middle of California, 430 miles long and, at some points, 75 miles wide.

Which, of course, says nothing about what it is like to be from the Valley, to be of the Valley. Sometimes Californians who live beyond the bowl of the Valley, and who know it only as the numbing landscape of long, hot journeys to the Sierra or treacherous creeps through the winter fog, will find out that I was born and raised in Fresno. It's not exactly a secret.

In fact, I have discovered living in and around Los Angeles, and later San Francisco, that a certain cachet comes with being able to declare, affecting just the slightest twang, that one's roots are Valley roots. No matter how suburban your childhood, it instantly is assumed that you are a yeoman of the land, that you know how to milk a cow or fix a tractor. Your counsel is sought on all questions concerning trees or Merle Haggard.

Eventually, these Californians not from the Valley will get around to asking their main question. I have been asked it, not once, but many, many times:

How can anyone stand living there?

They mean, of course, the heat.

Or they mean the visual blight of streets like Fresno's Blackstone Avenue.

Or they mean the reputation as a haven for hicks, summed up nicely — no, make that not nicely at all — by a travel guide entry that describes Fresno as a town where culture is commonly understood to be "what they take from your throat when you have strep."

My typical response is to mumble and fall back on humor. It's a great place to be *from*, I will say. Occasionally, though, I do rise to the bait and mount a defense that would make the chamber proud. I mention affordable housing prices and feeding the world and Saroyan and the Fresno poets. I recite from memory the names of Fresno State Bulldogs who have gone on to athletic glory in the pros. I talk about the advantages of central location. Yes, I come from a town that has promoted itself as being "so close to so much," a slogan which, to my ears, sounds an awful lot like "close, but no cigar," but this last observation I do not share with the inquisitive outsiders.

What I cannot tell them, because only Valley inhabitants would understand, is about the summer nights — about what it's like to emerge from the air-conditioned cocoons of the day and drink in the calming midnight air, to roam through the city on foot, or bicycle, or in a car, windows down, music up, deep into the night.

I cannot tell them about the faint hint of snow that can be sensed in spring breezes that blow down from the mountains, or the powerful, earthy fragrance of grapes baking on the ground into raisins. Or the taste of the cold water pumped from the well behind our house, or the Thompson grapes stolen — we kids preferred to think of it more as a rite of passage than theft — straight from the neighbor's vines across the street.

Valley things.

The Valley where I grew up still felt connected to agriculture. In the early years of parochial school, it seemed we always were being urged to pray for rain — to help the farmers. The exception was in the summer, when the grapes were drying on their trays in the vineyards. Then we were prodded to pray for it *not* to rain — again, to help the farmers.

"The Valley had no calendar," is how, in his novel, "California Time," Ernest J. Finney has described the agricultural imprint on the Valley. "Time in California wasn't measured out in months; it was by crops. Spring meant strawberries, then the apricots, cherries, peaches, and it was summer, hot as fire; tomatoes, squash, plums, Thompson seedless, figs. Fall, still blazing hot, was cotton, persimmons, pomegranates, walnuts, almonds. Winter was oranges, tangerines, and lemons. Then the dead time arrived, tule fog like a thick spread of moonwash hiding the sun, and you couldn't be sure you were awake or alive, everyone laying low, waiting for the first almond blossoms in February, when time started up again."

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The Valley where I grew up was a place where kids roamed in packs for miles on their bicycles, where in the summertime they would lose their shoes for months, developing enormous, asphalt-blackened calluses on the bottoms of their feet. The Valley where I grew up had a certain topographical logic to it. It was still possible, on good days anyway, to stand in one spot and see both the Sierra and Coastal ranges. And seeing those mountains, it was impossible not to daydream about what life was like on the other side, and await the day of escape.

Tulare dust in the farm boy's nose, sang Haggard, *wonderin' where the freight train goes.*

Much of the Valley where I grew up *is gone, or at least going fast. Of course, this is what* people almost always say about almost any place. "All that is constant about the California of my childhood," Joan Didion wrote about her native Sacramento, "is the rate at which it disappears." This was in a *Holiday* magazine piece first published in 1965. I wonder how much of the California of her childhood Didion could find today, nearly 35 years of change later.

Still, it cannot be denied: The north Fresno fig orchards where we congregated late summer nights as teenagers are now houses. A steady haze of dust and smog makes it difficult sometimes to make out from the valley floor even the Sierra foothills, and forget about the coast range. There are days when the local news seems an endless litany of crimes against children, and what parent would let their kids roam free in that world? And the more they grow, the less the bigger towns — "population centers," as they often are called in all the growth studies and reports — seem attached in any real way to the surrounding agriculture.

Contrast Finney's agrarian calendar, from a novel set in the 1920s, to the more recent observations of author Victor Davis Hanson, a Selma raisin grower and Fresno State professor of Greek: "They no longer care where or how they get their food, as long as it is firm, fresh, and cheap," he wrote in "Fields Without Dreams" of American town people in general and valley town people in particular. "They have no interest in preventing the urbanization of their farmland as long as parks, Little League fields, and an occasional bike lane are left amid the concrete, stucco, and asphalt. They have no need of someone who they are not, who reminds them of their past and not their future."

□□□

However belatedly, a disclaimer must now be added: To talk of collective mindsets and such is a risky venture when addressing such a vast region and diverse population. There is no one Valley viewpoint, no one Valley experience. Within the Valley all sorts of feuds and jealousies and conflicts simmer. Great agricultural wealth rubs shoulders with some of the worst poverty in the land — not exactly an economic coincidence, some would argue. Having filled out the Santa Clara Valley, high tech now has begun to lap over the Altamont Pass, bringing jobs to Sacramento and a real estate boom to places like Tracy, but elsewhere in the Valley depressed little farmtowns must sell their municipal souls to the prison boom in the hope of steadier employment and maybe even a McDonald's.

The Valley I know is only the Valley I know, and that leaves out a whole lot. For someone who grew up in the San Joaquin Valley, the Sacramento Valley can seem a foreign place. The mountains loom up closer, and the light has a different slant and cast to it. Even the dirt looks different. In a similar vein, I wonder about the Hmong refugees who huddle over their hoes, working postcard plots of strawberries on the fringes of many Valley towns. Their literature has not yet emerged, so for now their Valley must remain by and large a mystery to the rest of us. Thirty-five years from now, what vanished artifacts of their early Valley days will these people be lamenting? What is their Valley?

There are other things I wonder about as I sit at the Mammoth Orange and watch the trucks roar by, rippling

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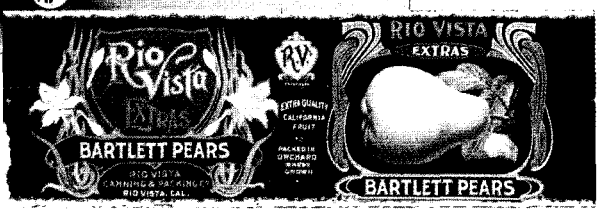

the oleanders in the center divide. I wonder if the Valley actually will grow as fast and furious as the state forecasts suggest. I have no reason to doubt the numbers, but is it possible the Valley might be hiding some punches? Could the August heat and winter fog sieges serve as a sort of moat of discomfort, driving down the numbers?

Could the mounting concern over Valley growth be a bit overblown? It's possible to drive west from this spot toward Los Banos on Highway 152 and for 40 miles see almost nothing but cattle pastures, orchards, alfalfa fields, farm ditches, a farmhouse and filling station or two — agriculture stretching out from horizon to horizon. It's a big place, the Valley, and most of it shows little promise of becoming, as the phrase of dread goes, "the next L.A." Of course, drive north and south on Highway 99, and the predictions don't seem far-fetched at all. It's possible to see towns in motion, traveling toward one another as fast as the house framers can hammer.

If the population growth does come, how will it change Valley politics? I am not speaking of Republicans and Democrats, or conservatives and the progressives formally known as liberals. I am talking about real politics, ground-level politics. As the towns grow, will the townsfolk in turn grow more impatient with city councils that are willing to be led about by developers?

Will the agrarians, who generally have kept a wary distance from the city power-structures in the past, now pay for their rugged isolation? Is it possible that the 15 million Valley residents of 2040 might come to question the long-standing assumption that agriculture needs most of the water and the ability to spray chemicals into the valley's shared air?

And yet, if agriculture does crumble — as some of the studies project it might — what would replace it? Does anybody really believe the next Silicon Valley or Hollywood will rise out of the vines of raisinland? Should maybe the valley's economic push be, not for less agriculture, but for more of it — enticing the big agricultural concerns, for just one example, to move their corporate headquarters out of places like L.A.'s Bunker Hill or the Bay Area's San Ramon and into the Valley? Advocates of economic diversity for the Valley refer, quite appropriately, to the persistent high unemployment and farmtown poverty. At the same time, the Valley weathered the last recession better than any other region of California. What is the message in that?

Beyond politics and economics, how will the Valley itself be altered? Will it be just a lot more of the same? Triple the drive time to shop at the Target that was supposed to be a Nordstrom. Triple the thickness of the haze that hides the mountains. Or could something grander rise up out of the dust? Could this become a place with the demographic clout to demand that place "on the map" which it coveted for so long, but also with the taste and smarts and leadership to avoid becoming just a poor man's Los Angeles — without the beach, or economic muscle.

In short, I wonder if it can be done right.

I wonder what the point of the place will be if it cannot.

A man could feel our city was beautiful, Saroyan wrote. *Or a man could feel that our city was fake, that our lives were empty, and that we were the contemporaries of jack-rabbits. Or a man could have one viewpoint in the morning and another in the evening.*

Peter H. King is a columnist for the Sacramento, Fresno and Modesto Bees. *Comments on this essay may be sent to editor@statenet.com.*

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A sense of place, a clash of memory

by Sigrid Bathen

I knew it was changing, irrevocably so, one beautiful spring day about 10 years ago, when my then 12-year-old daughter and I were walking with my parents in Bidwell Park, that vast and stunning natural resource a few steps from the front door of the house where I was raised. We walked what my mother calls "the loop," a trek that took us down a worn trail near the park's entrance, under the roar of the ugly, 1960s-era elevated freeway, across an arched wooden footbridge over Chico Creek.

As we passed under a huge canopy of oaks shading the Saturday softball games, we encountered a wild-looking man yelling at a frightened, cowering young woman much smaller than himself. Probably out of his head on drugs, booze, or both – the methamphetamine labs said to be proliferating in rural enclaves of the Central Valley came to mind — he was threatening to cut off the young woman's finger if she didn't return the ring she was struggling to remove.

To my horror, my mother, who is five feet tall and was then nearly 70, walked up to this big crazed man, shook her finger at him, and told him he should be ashamed of himself and to leave the woman alone. I was thunderstruck when, meek as a kitten, he did precisely that. "Please Mom," I later implored, "next time just call the police."

Not long afterward, there was a serious assault on a jogger in the park. Then, shortly after Thanksgiving in 1990, a young man with cerebral palsy was found by an early-morning park worker lying in a pool of blood, beaten to death near "Annie's Glen," a verdant picnic grove named for the wife of the town's founder, by thugs who stole his bicycle. More recently, two Butte Community College football players, both 19, were charged last year with beating to death a homeless man who was sleeping in the bushes of an apartment building near the bucolic campus of California State University, Chico. In what the prosecutor described as the worst beating he had ever seen, the burly athletes (one weighed nearly 300 pounds), beat the 5'7" victim with a 40-pound water jug and a metal tire rim.

The harsh contemporary details of these quintessentially "urban" crimes in the rural North Valley community where my parents moved from Sacramento in 1947, when I was nearly 1, clash now with my memories as a child playing in Bidwell Park with a sense of total innocence and complete security, when my brother and sister and I worried only about catching poison oak and getting home before dark.

Our father, a businessman active in civic affairs, a city councilman and mayor, cautioned us that the park was sometimes a haven for "undesirables" of various sorts, that the small city police force really couldn't afford to patrol it properly, and we should always go in groups. Years later, in a reflection of the changing times, my daughter and her cousins were allowed to go there only with adults in tow.

By the mid-1960s, I was attending Chico State and sharing a student apartment near the place where the homeless man would be killed some three decades later. Even then, we rarely locked the doors of our homes or our cars, and the only even marginally criminal act I recall from that time was when some neighborhood kids entered my parents' home through an unlocked door and raided the liquor cabinet. My father didn't discover the crime until he went to the bar to pour himself a scotch and soda a couple of evenings later.

Crime is hardly the only measure of change in a place. Now when we visit our parents in their house in one of the new subdivisions that have sprouted like Legos south of town, I feel like I've been transported to some tile-and-stucco southern California suburb, anchored by big shopping malls on either end of town. The "downtown" where my father's office supply store is located, though he sold it years ago, is a charming collection of boutiques and restaurants, but hardly the business center it once was.

The backyard of their house abuts a rocky gorge that becomes a small stream in the winter, and they can sit on the patio in good weather and gaze out over a field of wild grasses and giant oaks where cows graze. My 81-year-old father says this declining "open space" will probably outlast his lifetime – that's his plan, at any rate — though the developers will get to it soon enough.

Sigrid Bathen is senior editor of the California Journal. She can be contacted at sigridb@statenet.com

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Health

Sexually healthy teens are less likely to become parents. But what does it mean for teens to be sexually healthy? It means that they have the knowledge and skills they need to make responsible decisions about their sexual behavior. It means that they understand sexual development and feelings. It means they have the skills and self-esteem to set personal boundaries. And it means they're motivated to think about the future consequences of the decisions they make today.

What can you do?

Consider the "whole teen" when making program and policy decisions that affect teen health.

Support community and school programs that promote healthy adolescent sexuality and teen pregnancy prevention.

Help the teens in your family develop healthy values and attitudes about their own sexuality and learn how to prevent unplanned pregnancies.

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The "Get Real About Teen Pregnancy" public education campaign is funded by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation.

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As Central Valley Latinos go politically, so should others

by Sherry Bebitch Jeffe

In the 1960s, there were few visible Latino political leaders. For Southern Californians, indeed throughout the state, the dominant face of Latino politics was that of Cesar Chavez. Migrant. Activist. Of the Central Valley. The social fervor of the Delano-based founder of the United Farm Workers union came to define both the political and geographic base of Latino activism.

But times have changed. And so have the Central Valley, Southern California and the dynamics of Latino politics. It is no accident that the highest-ranking Latino elected to statewide office this century is Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante, a self-styled "moderate guy" from the Central Valley.

As the economic dominance of agribusiness eroded, the power of Chavez and his agrarian-centered, social-movement politics began to wane.

Later, the Big Green environmental regulation initiative of 1990 underscored the split between urban and rural interests which had come to define Latino politics. Farm workers liked the initiative's pesticide ban and other environmental protections but many urban Latinos who worked in light industries felt economically threatened by Big Green's strict chemical bans.

With the urbanization and sprawling suburbanization of the Central Valley, the "agrarian" — nationalistic — model of Latino politics has been replaced, says political analyst Gregory Rodriquez, by an "ethnically transcendent" prototype more reflective of the Valley's changing economic and political profile. This new Latino leader doesn't desert his or her ethnicity but, in the words of another analyst, "doesn't put ethnic identity first."

Assemblymember Dean Florez (D-Shafter) fits that mold. Florez, a former staffer for state Senator Art Torres, defeated GOP incumbent Robert Prenter in 1998. Despite Prenter's attempt to "Los Angelize" Florez by attacking his ties to Torres, Florez, a Harvard-educated investment banker with strong community roots, effectively distanced himself from the Latino political elite and ran as a local with "Valley values."

Until recently, the predominant Southern California model of Latino politics remained what Assembly Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa has labeled the "enclave politics" of Los Angeles' urban core. Many of its leaders emerged from the urban Chicano movement of the 60s and 70s. The district now represented by Democratic Assemblyman Gil Cedillo reflects that tradition. A former union organizer backed by Villaraigosa, labor and immigrant rights groups, Cedillo handily won a 1997 special election in the predominantly Latino East L.A. district, hammering home the message that he could best oppose then-Governor Pete Wilson's anti-immigrant policies.

> Every demographic group and political party must learn from those candidates who have successfully moved beyond ethnocentricity.

But as California enters the 21st century, the state's diversity continues to increase; ethnic enclaves are dispersing as minorities move up the socio-economic ladder and look for lifestyles beyond the inner cities. And demographics continue to reshape the dynamics of Latino politics in this state.

New political leaders — emerging from both major parties — are following a formula similar to that which has elected moderate Latinos in the Central Valley. Nowhere is the changing profile of Latino political leadership more clearly outlined than in that other "Valley" political powerhouse — the San Fernando Valley.

Throughout California, Latino candidates are now winning in non-Latino districts. In 1998, Republican Robert Pacheco replaced outgoing Assemblyman Gary Miller (R-Diamond Bar) in an Inland Empire suburban district. In Sacramento, Deborah Ortiz, a former Sacramento city councilmember and staffer for state Senator Richard Polanco, defeated Republican Chris Quackenbush, wife of the state's Insurance Commissioner, to win a moderate state Senate district. In a truly "ethnically transcendent" move, Ortiz used mailers showing her with Governor Wilson and Dan Lungren, the GOP's nominee to replace him.

To survive politically in 21st century California, every demographic group and political party must learn from those candidates who have successfully moved beyond ethnocentricity. And Central Valley Latinos have helped to lead the way.

Contributing Editor Sherry Bebitch Jeffe teaches at Claremont Graduate University. Comments may be sent to editor@statenet.com.

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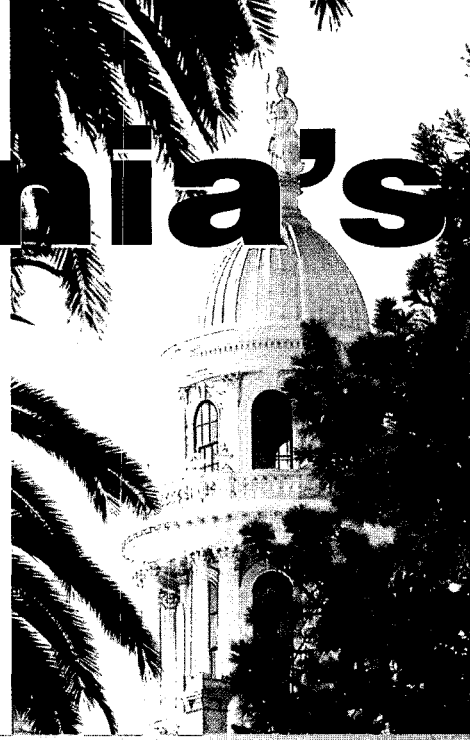
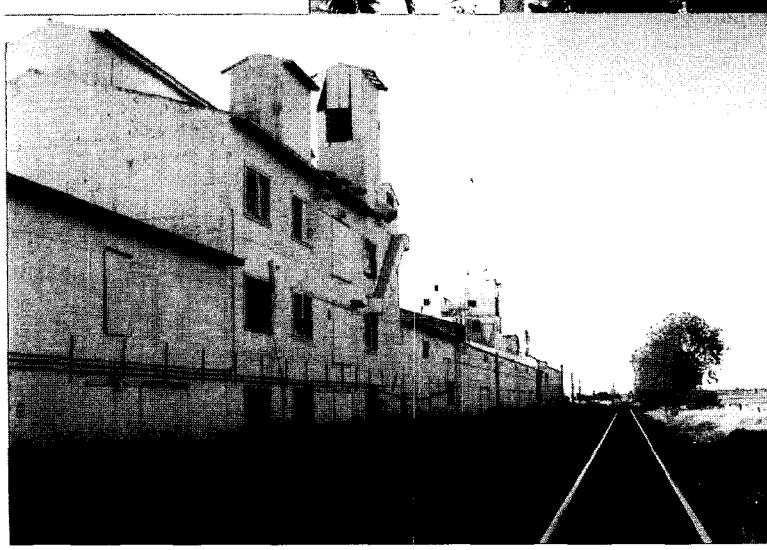


Though it is much more than just a "land of cotton," the Central Valley shares some important political similarities with the southern United States. But the Valley's changing demographics could dramatically alter the way the region votes in the 21st century.

By Steve Scott



History will record that California's Central Valley was the scene of one of the defining moments of the 1996 presidential campaign. During the September stretch drive of what turned out to be a crushing defeat at the hands of Bill Clinton, former Kansas Senator Robert Dole whisked into Chico for one of those in-and-out campaign appearances. Before addressing supporters from a makeshift platform, Dole leaned down to shake some hands, and tumbled head-first off the stage into a nest of photographers.

Video from the spill aired nationally that night, and for days afterward, with national pundits gleefully using the incident as a metaphor for a campaign that just couldn't "find its footing." But for many California Republicans, Dole's mere presence in the Valley was every bit as revealing as his slip of the foot. The 1996 GOP hopeful spent a lot of time traversing California's spine, an indication of its importance to the party's statewide election math. A large margin of victory in the Central Valley (which Dole eventually failed to get) has become almost as critical to statewide victory for the GOP as heavy turnout in Orange County. Some argue that it has become even more important.

"If Republicans are going to carry the state, they almost have to carry the Central Valley," said Mark DiCamillo, director of the statewide Field Poll.

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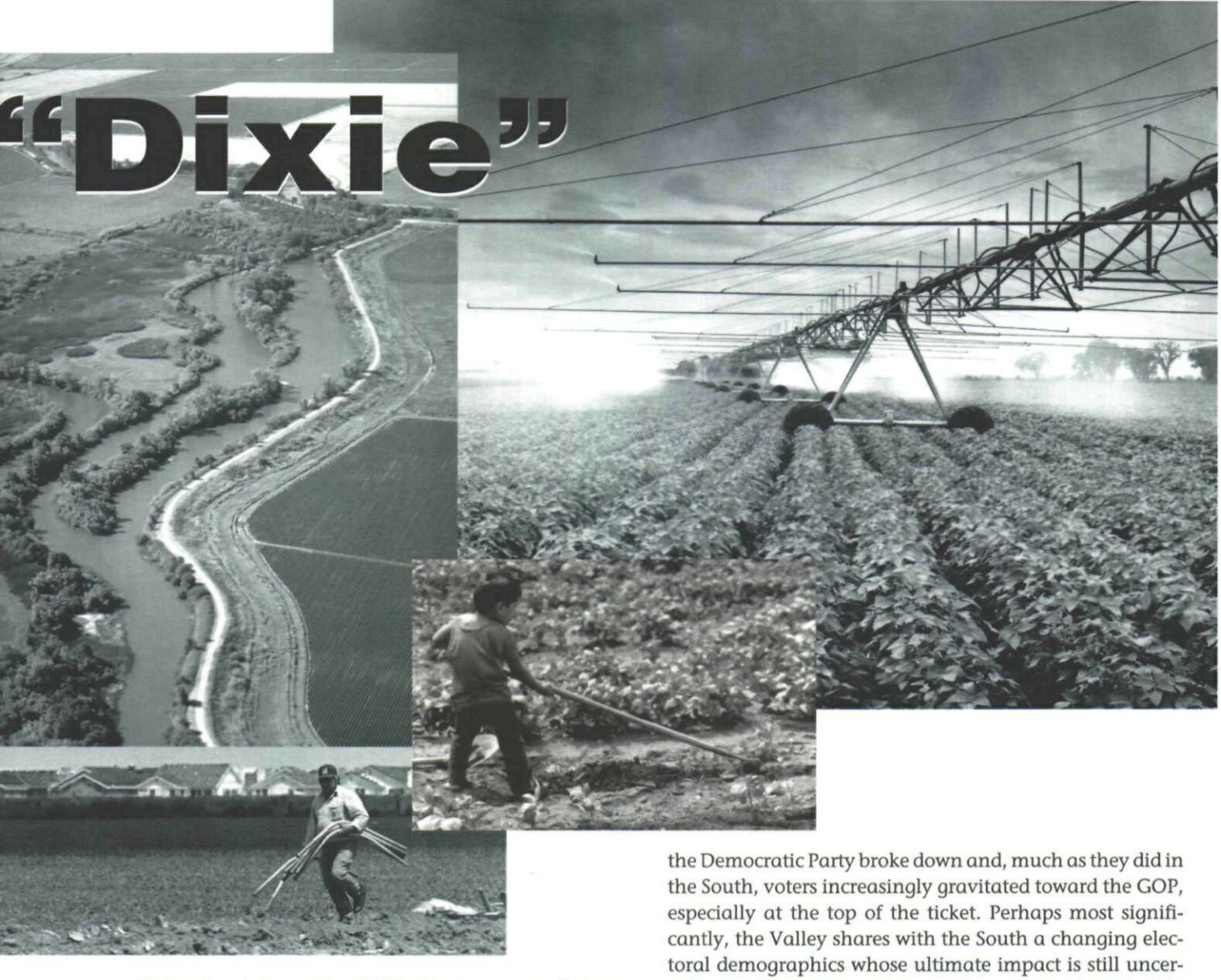
"Dixie"



If this description of the GOP's "Valley strategy" rings a bell, it should. It sounds suspiciously like the national game plan which two California Republicans named Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan employed to construct what, for almost two decades, was referred to as the Republican Electoral College lock. They called their system "the Southern strategy."

"[Fresno's Democratic state Senator] Jim Costa likes to say that if California were a nation, the Central Valley would be 'The South,'" said Rick Lehman, who represented much of the San Joaquin Valley in Congress for a decade in the '80s and '90s. "To which I always add, 'And the further south you go, the further "South" you get.'"

Rural mindset

There is more to the composite observation of Costa and Lehman than rhetorical one-upmanship. Like the Deep South, the Central Valley is a region heavily influenced by the rural mindset at its foundation. As in the South, Valley denizens bring to the ballot box a streak of social and cultural conservatism, with a higher concentration of church-goers than California as a whole. Over the last three decades, the Valley's historic identification with the Democratic Party broke down and, much as they did in the South, voters increasingly gravitated toward the GOP, especially at the top of the ticket. Perhaps most significantly, the Valley shares with the South a changing electoral demographics whose ultimate impact is still uncertain as California — and the nation — move into the 21st century.

"It's closer to being a virtual microcosm of the state," said conservative political consultant Chuck Cavalier. "I can easily understand why Republicans and Democrats alike think it's up for grabs."

The Central Valley's historic reputation as a "swing" region of the state is the product of a variety of influences, both demographic and economic, which vary within the Valley itself. North of Sacramento, the flavor is classic rural America. Largely Anglo, the region's voters tend to be strongly pro-property rights and strongly anti-government. Political options tend to boil down to a choice between conservative and more conservative. In the mid-1980s, the northern Valley was the core audience for Sacramento conservative talk-show host Rush Limbaugh, and can justifiably claim credit for helping catapult Limbaugh to national syndication.

"I can look out my window and see four or five different [Assembly] districts," said Sacramento-based GOP political consultant Wayne Johnson. "All of 'em are more Republican, except the one I'm sitting in."

That downtown Sacramento district is, in fact, prob-

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ably the most liberal in the entire Valley. South of this urbanized cell, traditional rural values are textured by the influences of the California melting pot. Throughout the San Joaquin Valley, one finds the influence of several generations of Latinos, especially migrant farm workers from Mexico, whose numbers grew as 19th century family farming gave way to 20th century corporate agriculture. In the upper San Joaquin Valley, the descendants of Gold Rush washouts provide a kaleidoscope of surnames, with Asian and Portuguese influences running particularly strong. South of the Valley's other urban hub, Fresno, influences become identifiably "Southern," as refugees from the Dust Bowl — notably from Oklahoma and other so-called "border states" — concentrated in and around Bakersfield.

"The Valley strategy"

Party affiliation among voters in the Valley used to be solidly Democratic, a product of Southern influences and the New Deal water projects that literally created the Valley's agricultural economy. "[The San Joaquin] Valley had an astonishingly liberal voting record ... that was powered largely by the city of Fresno," recalled former Fresno Democratic Assemblyman Bruce Bronzan. But as with the South, that identification began to change in the 1970s in response to the Democrats' identification with urban social programs and the anti-war movement. The result was a surge in GOP registration and the birth of "the Valley strategy." That strategy reached its apex in 1994, when voters pushed then-Governor Pete Wilson to a muscular re-election victory and helped bring Republican Michael Huffington to within a hair's breadth of the United States Senate.

"The Valley is socially conservative compared with the rest of California," said Democratic political consultant Darry Sragow, who has managed the Assembly Democrats' legislative campaigns the last two election cycles. "Those older more traditional mores of abiding by the rules, and treating others the way you would be treated still hold more."

Sragow also notes, however, that the Valley is "not overly conservative on the spectrum of American politics." Unlike the Deep South — an area riven by centuries of racial division — the Valley's patchwork of ethnicities has produced a strain of pragmatism that characterizes most of the region's own elected leadership. While staunch conservatives tend to succeed in the extreme northern and southern sections of the Valley, the bulk of the region is represented by relative moderates — coalition-builders who have often become leaders within their parties.

Democrats, such as "Blue Dog" Democratic U.S. Representative Gary Condit and state Senators Jim Costa of Fresno and Patrick Johnston of Stockton, distanced themselves from their party's liberal wing. Republicans, such as

A sampling of the Valley's power elite

Phil Angelides
State Treasurer
Elected: 1998;
Termed Out: 2006
Home: Sacramento;
Age: 46
The late Jesse Unruh made the treasurer's office a powerhouse by controlling state investments, and Angelides, former chairman of the state Democratic Party, knows how to leverage power.

Cruz Bustamante
Lieutenant Governor
Elected: 1998; Termed Out: 2006
Home: Fresno; Age: 46
Bustamante made history as the first Latino speaker of the Assembly, and he still carries a lot of clout as a symbol of rising Latino power. His recent dust-up with Governor Gray Davis over the state's appeal of Proposition 187 (see "Up Front") may actually enhance that clout.

Jim Costa
State Senator,
District 16
Elected: 1994;
Termed Out: 2002
Home: Fresno; Age: 47
As a veteran legislator and chairman of the Senate Agriculture and Water Resources Committee, Democrat Costa is agriculture's "go-to" guy.

Gary Condit
U.S. Representative,
District 18
Elected: 1989
Home: Ceres; Age: 51
An original "blue dog" Democrat, Condit has seen his party battle back from oblivion by embracing the centrist views he espoused throughout his career. His congressional seat was once held by Democrat Tony Coelho, recently named chairman of Vice President Al Gore's presidential campaign.

Grantland Johnson
Secretary, Health and Human Services Agency
Appointed: 1999
Home: Sacramento;
Age: 50
Appointed by Governor Gray Davis, Johnson was regional director of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in the Clinton administration before taking on the state's counterpart agency, which tends to the state's health, social and welfare programs.

Pat Johnston
State Senator,
District 5
Elected 1991;
Termed Out: 2000
Home: Stockton;
Age: 52
As chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Democrat Johnston exerts influence over virtually every aspect of California government.

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former state Senator Ken Maddy and Secretary of State Bill Jones, avoided the ideological identification characteristic of their party's conservative wing. "Unless you were from the Kern County area ... a moderate stance was characteristic," said Maddy, who spent nearly 30 years representing Fresno and environs in Sacramento.

Ag and water transcend

Also characteristic of Valley politicians is a receptiveness to local issues, most notably agriculture, a $25 billion industry. Agricultural and water issues have traditionally dominated the politics of the Valley, and party identification virtually disappears when the region's political leaders zero in on those issues. "As a group, Valley people have been able to work together on district issues," said Bronzan. "Often, we'd been thought of as achieving more than what our numbers might suggest." In return for their ability to "bring home the bacon," Valley voters have generally rewarded their leaders with a personal loyalty in keeping with their rural underpinnings.

"I've always said that the Valley was a great place to represent if you got on their side," said Maddy. "They have to feel like they know you ... feel like you can relate to them in some fashion."

If Valley voters are predictably pragmatic and loyal in their choices for local offices, they have recently become less predictable with respect to statewide offices. The 62 percent with which former Governor Pete Wilson won Fresno County in 1994 dropped to 48 percent for Dole in 1996 and 49 percent for gubernatorial aspirant and Attorney General Dan Lungren in 1998. Lungren beat eventual winner Gray Davis by a scant 2 percent in the county and badly lost in Kings, Merced, San Joaquin and Sacramento counties.

"The interesting thing about the last election is that Davis actually beat Lungren in the Valley," said the Field Poll's DiCamillo, whose definition of the Valley includes both the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys. "You've seen in the last two elections that it's a swing area."

To be sure, Davis' Valley success was, in part, attributable to his willingness to play to the region's traditional conservatism. Independent expenditures on his behalf, sponsored by the California Correctional Peace Officers Association, emphasized Davis' war record and tough-on-crime stance. But Davis also won the Valley by appealing to two constituencies which have the potential to radically alter the region's self-perception and, ultimately, its voting habits — suburban transplants and Latinos.

Urban overflow

The steady encroachment of suburban development into the Valley has become a political fact of life. With housing tracts spreading southeast from the Bay Area and northeast from Los Angeles, the San Joaquin, Merced and

Bill Jones
Secretary of State
Elected: 1994;
Termed Out: 2002
Home: Fresno; Age: 49

A former Assembly minority leader, Jones now is the highest-ranking Republican officeholder in California and widely touted as a potential gubernatorial candidate in 2002.

Bob Matsui
U.S. Representative,
District 5
Elected: 1978
Home: Sacramento;
Age: 57

Democrat Matsui is one half of a Washington power team that includes his wife, Doris, who works in the Clinton White House. Because of his senority and reputation as a consensus builder, Matsui is poised to assume a more prominent role should Democrats regain control of the House in 2000.

Charles Poochigian
State Senator,
District 14
Elected: 1998;
Termed Out: 2006
Home: Fresno; Age: 50

A voice of reason highly respected for his problem-solving skills, Republican Poochigian succeeded a Central Valley legend — former state Senator Ken Maddy (R-Fresno).

Carol Whiteside
President, Great Valley Center
Founded: 1997
Home: Modesto;
Age: 56

Former Modesto Mayor Whiteside served a brief stint in the Wilson administration as assistant secretary of the Resources Agency. Her organization spearheads growth planning for the Central Valley.

William Thomas
U.S. Representative,
District 21
Elected: 1978
Home: Bakersfield;
Age: 58

Republican Thomas' congressional career has resembled a yo-yo — in favor one moment; out of favor the next. For now, he enjoys the clout that comes with seats on the Budget and Ways and Means committees.

— Steve Scott, A.G. Block

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Kings counties are among the fastest growing in the state. "You are getting the overflow from the cities into what used to be rural areas, turning them into suburban areas," said DiCamillo. Like the suburbanites migrating from the Northeast to the Deep South, many come in search of a safer environment and more affordable housing. But unlike those who head for Dixie in hopes of becoming "southerners," California's suburban refugees seem by and large to view the Valley simply as a cheaper place to sleep nights.

"The people who are moving into the Valley are still commuting to the Bay Area," noted Johnson. "They're very much work-centered rather than community-centered. They're living and working in two different worlds."

With this suburban ethos also comes a more suburban issue mix. While CCPOA was touting Davis' war record in the Valley, the candidate himself was talking about education and his support for a 10th University of California campus — in Merced. These newcomers are also conditioned to be less fearful of environmental laws than those already living in the Valley. If the trend continues, many observers believe the suburban influence will eventually mitigate the traditional political influence enjoyed by agriculture in the Central Valley.

"It used to be that national politicians just had to [kiss up to] the farmers," said Lehman. "Now you come into the Valley and you've got to talk about education, you've got to talk about crime — a whole bunch of issues that weren't there before."

Up until 1996, suburban voters were considered the domain of Republicans, who would target them on hot-button issues such as crime and immigration. But these new migrants will not simply serve to augment the area's pre-existing conservatism. The sustained prosperity of the 1990s has eased concerns about crime, supplanting them with gathering worry about the state of public education. Clinton and Davis were each effective at recasting their party as a haven for pragmatic moderates while simultaneously stereotyping the GOP as out of the mainstream. To no one's surprise, the most heavily suburbanized Valley counties went for Clinton in '96 and Davis in '98.

Latino influence

"When President Clinton got the Democrat Party off of their socially liberal agenda and talking about more middle-class issues, they eroded Republican advantages in the suburbs and therefore in the Valley," said GOP political consultant Sal Russo, Maddy's long-time advisor.

Republicans have far from given up on these suburban voters. Should the Democrats give too much ground to its left flank, the GOP could easily reassume dominance, and even if Democrats remain smart, competition for these economically conservative, socially libertarian voters will be fierce. But a much tougher road lies ahead of the GOP with respect to that other growing demographic in the Valley — Latinos.

The Valley's strong Hispanic presence goes back several generations, and heavily Latino communities such as Sanger in Fresno County and Exeter in Tulare County have been electing local Latino leaders for years. The fallout from 1994's immigration initiative, Proposition 187, energized Valley Latinos as much as their urban *compadres* in Los Angeles. But Hispanics in the Valley had more than just hatred of Pete Wilson. They had their own role model: Cruz Bustamante. Rising through the Assembly Democratic ranks in the aftermath of the Democratic defeats in 1994, Bustamante became the state's first Latino speaker when his party regained control of the Assembly in 1996. Two years later, he became the first Latino in the 20th century to be elected to statewide office when he won the race for lieutenant governor.

"There was a long difficulty finding strong consistent quality leaders in the Hispanic community for years," said Bronzan, for whom Bustamante worked as a legislative aide and whom he replaced in the Assembly. "When Cruz came along, he kind of ushered in a little bit of a different era. Here was a moderate, quiet, thoughtful, hardworking guy. His personality and his style and the time were perfectly matched."

Bustamante also perfectly matched the profile of Latinos in the Valley. Unlike recent urban immigrants, who often still closely identify with their country of origin, Latinos in the Central Valley are just as likely to be second- and third-generation citizens. Bustamante himself was every bit as tenacious working to protect agriculture in the Legislature as he was protecting Latinos, and insists the "Latino agenda" is identical to that of the suburban refugees also flooding the Valley.

GOP targets Latinos

"When I came to the Legislature they couldn't quite figure me out," said Bustamante. "I was a Latino like a lot of other Latinos ... but they were all from Los Angeles and here I was talking about agriculture and water and being

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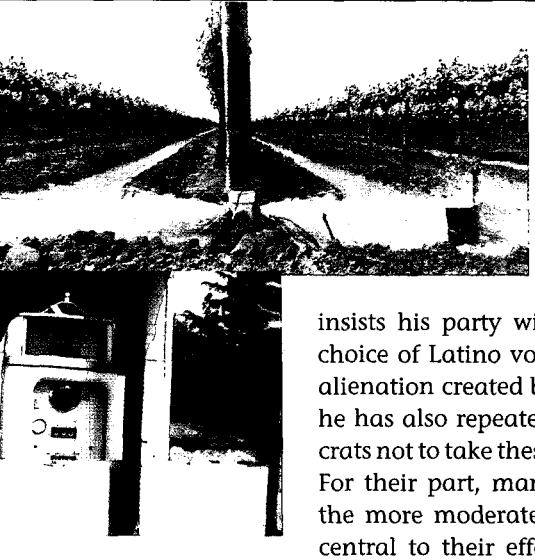

a moderate. They couldn't quite figure out what that meant."

Although Bustamante insists his party will remain the first choice of Latino voters because of the alienation created by Wilson and 187, he has also repeatedly warned Democrats not to take these votes for granted. For their part, many Republicans see the more moderate Valley Latinos as central to their efforts to rehabilitate their image in the aftermath of 187. Unlike African Americans in the South, whose rise to political prominence is largely a reaction to segregation and racism, Latinos in the Valley have a greater cultural and economic affinity with the agriculture-based power structure.

"Their values are more consistent with the ideals of the Republican Party," said Cavalier. "I think the Republican Party, if it does not focus and focus heavily on the emerging Latino population, will be making a big mistake."

So what do all of these new influences portend for the political complexion of the Central Valley? Well, so far the primary effect has been to create more legislative battlegrounds. Next year, Democrats are eyeing Assembly seats currently held by Republicans Peter Frusetta of Tres Pinos and Anthony Pescetti of Elk Grove. Republicans, meanwhile, can be expected to contest the open seat currently held by Democrat Mike Machado and to battle Machado himself for the seat held by termed-out state Senator Patrick Johnston. They can also be expected to look at Assembly incumbents Dennis Cardoza of Merced and Sarah Reyes of Fresno, a Latina who unseated Anglo Republican Robert Prenter last year.

Over the longer term, those familiar with the Valley believe change will come at a leisurely, "Valley" pace. "Agriculture will have less influence relatively speaking as time goes on, but the rate of change is going to be pretty slow," suggested Sragow. "It's going to happen over the next couple of decades." Moreover, what changes do occur will be mitigated, at least in part, as more suburban transplants begin to identify with where they live, rather than where they work. Just as transplants to the South wind up affecting a drawl, the suburban warriors may yet wind up becoming "Valley people."

"The jury's going to be out for ten years or so," predicts Carol Whiteside, director of the Modesto-based Great Valley Center. "The Valley's political identity will [be in transition] until the region has a sense of itself and what its priorities are."

Steve Scott is political editor of the California Journal. *Comments may be sent to editor@statenet.com.*

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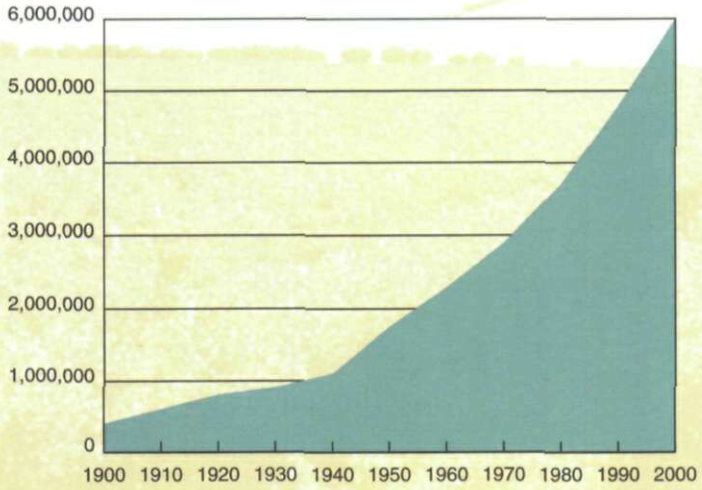
By the Numbers: A look at

Population

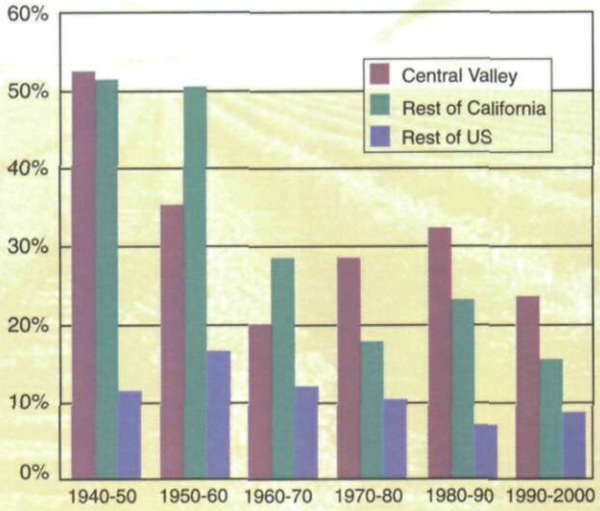
Central Valley Population
1900-2000

An estimated 5 to 6 million people live in the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys, which together comprise the Great Central Valley of California.



Ten-year Growth Rates
Percent increase by decade, 1940-2000

For the past 30 years, the Central Valley has led California in percentage of population growth.



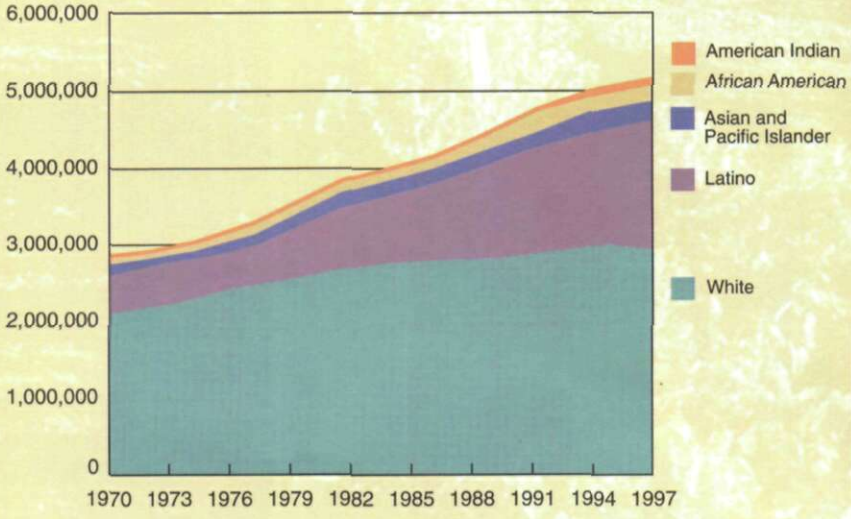
Five of 10 Fastest Growing California Cities are in the Central Valley
(Based on Percentage Change)

City	County	Population	% Change
Taft*	Kern	8,950	30.2
Corcoran*	Kings	20,900	21.2
Brentwood	Contra Costa	20,050	17.3
Rio Vista*	Solano	4,350	11.3
McFarland*	Kern	9,250	9.8
Rocklin*	Placer	31,700	7.6
Coronado	San Diego	28,700	7.1
Cloverdale	Sonoma	6,075	7.1
Fort Jones	Siskiyou	640	6.7
Murieta	Riverside	41,550	6.5

* Central Valley county

Central Valley Population by Ethnicity

A cornucopia of people has settled in the Central Valley



Sources: *A Statistical Tour of California's Great Central Valley*, 1998 by Kenneth W. Umbach, PhD., California Research Bureau; Public Policy Institute of California; California Department of Finance; Construction Industry Research Board.

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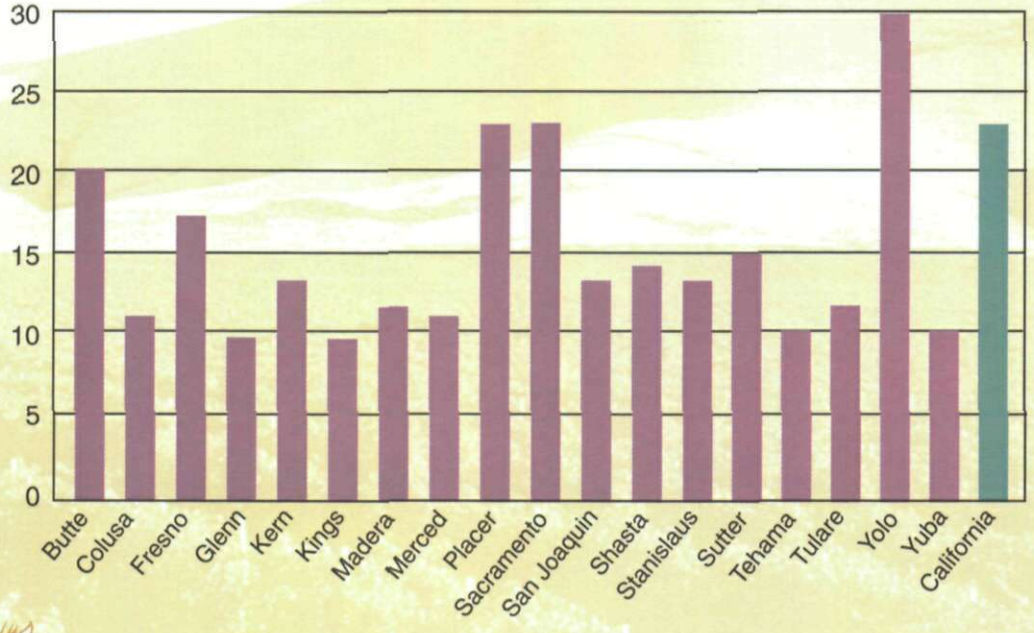
Education

Portion of the Population with a B.A. Degree or Higher

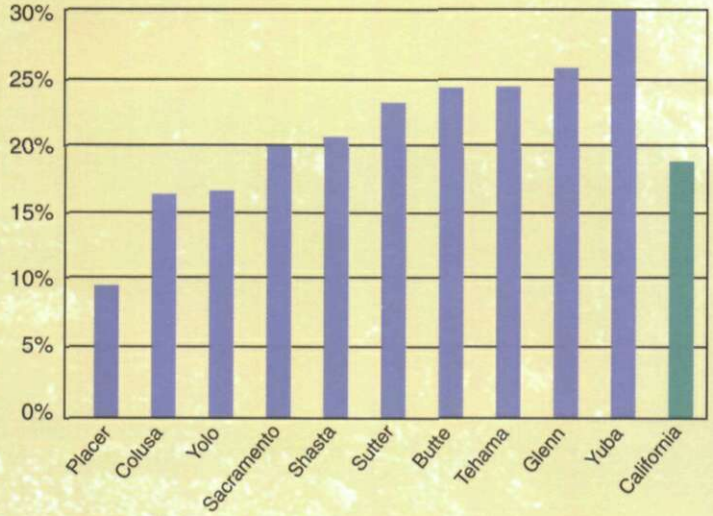


Fewer Central Valleyites have higher education degrees than do other Californians as a whole.

Economics

Average Poverty Rates for Children under 18

More children live in poverty in the Central Valley than elsewhere in California.



Of 10 California Counties with the Lowest Priced New Homes, Eight are in the Central Valley

County	Price	Price Change (97-98)
Kings*	$104,300	-4.7%
Madera*	$105,500	-6.2%
Merced*	$112,000	6.2&
Tulare*	$114,000	5.2%
Kern*	$120,000	-.4%
Sutter*	$120,500	3%
Humbolt	$128,500	-8.2%
Shasta*	$129,000	2.4%
Stanislaus*	$132,400	8.1%
Lake	$135,000	-2.9%

* Central Valley county

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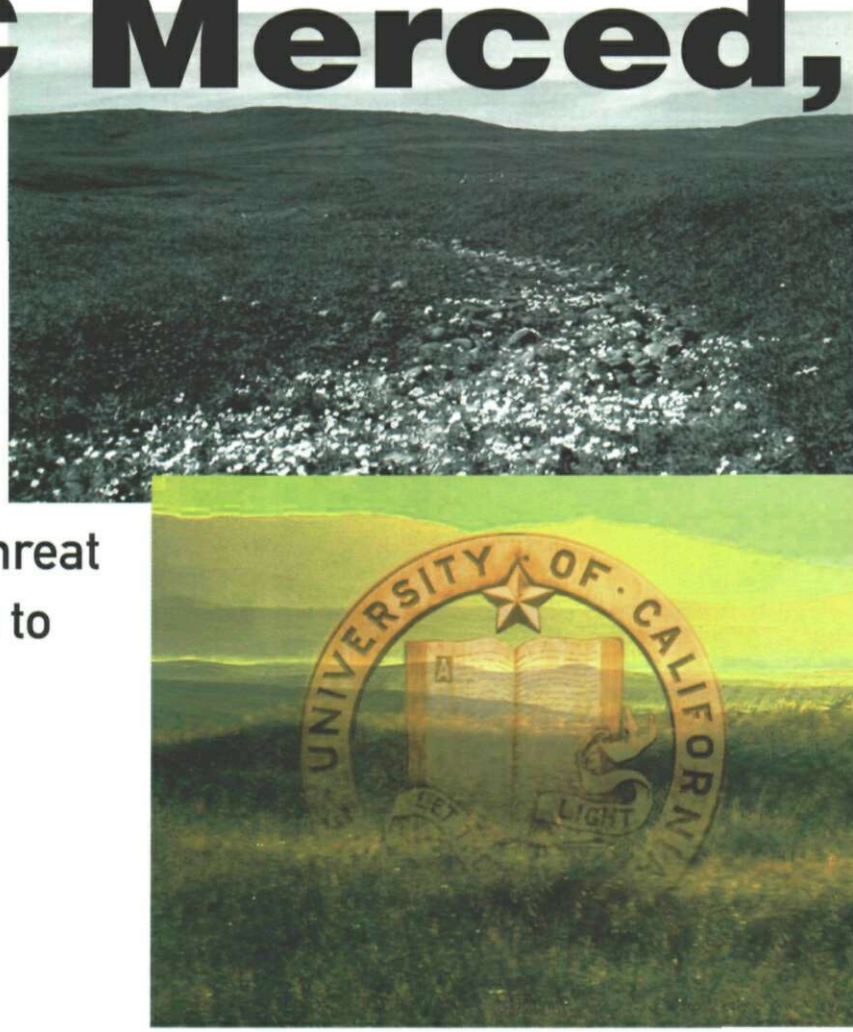
Here comes UC Merced,



Even the nation's highest-ranking environmentalist, Al Gore, is exerting political pressure to get UC-Merced on the fast track — regardless of the threat campus construction poses to pristine wetlands.

By William Fulton and Paul Shigley

Vice presidents don't turn up in Merced County very often, but on a Tuesday in early April Al Gore's plane hit the tarmac at Castle Air Force Base in Atwater just before noon. Gore was an hour late because of developments in Kosovo, but his tardiness didn't dampen Merced's enthusiasm for him — nor, apparently, did it dampen his enthusiasm for Merced.

The reason was simple: Although Gore arrived at a stark symbol of the Central Valley's current economic problems — Castle closed in 1995 — he was there to learn about the project that most observers believe is the Valley's best bet for future prosperity: the coming University of California campus at Merced.

After being greeted by the Golden Valley High School Band, Gore spent four hours meeting with local farmers, political leaders, students and teachers, listening to ambitious plans for the long-anticipated University of California campus.

Local leaders boasted about the digital technology and environmental research planned for UC Merced and asked for Gore's support in moving along construction of the campus, which is scheduled for ground breaking in about two years.

Then, flanked by two of the Valley's leading Democratic politicians — U.S. Representative Gary Condit (D-Modesto) and Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante — Gore declared his enthusiastic support for the whole UC-Merced effort. "I'm very impressed with what you guys are doing," he gushed.

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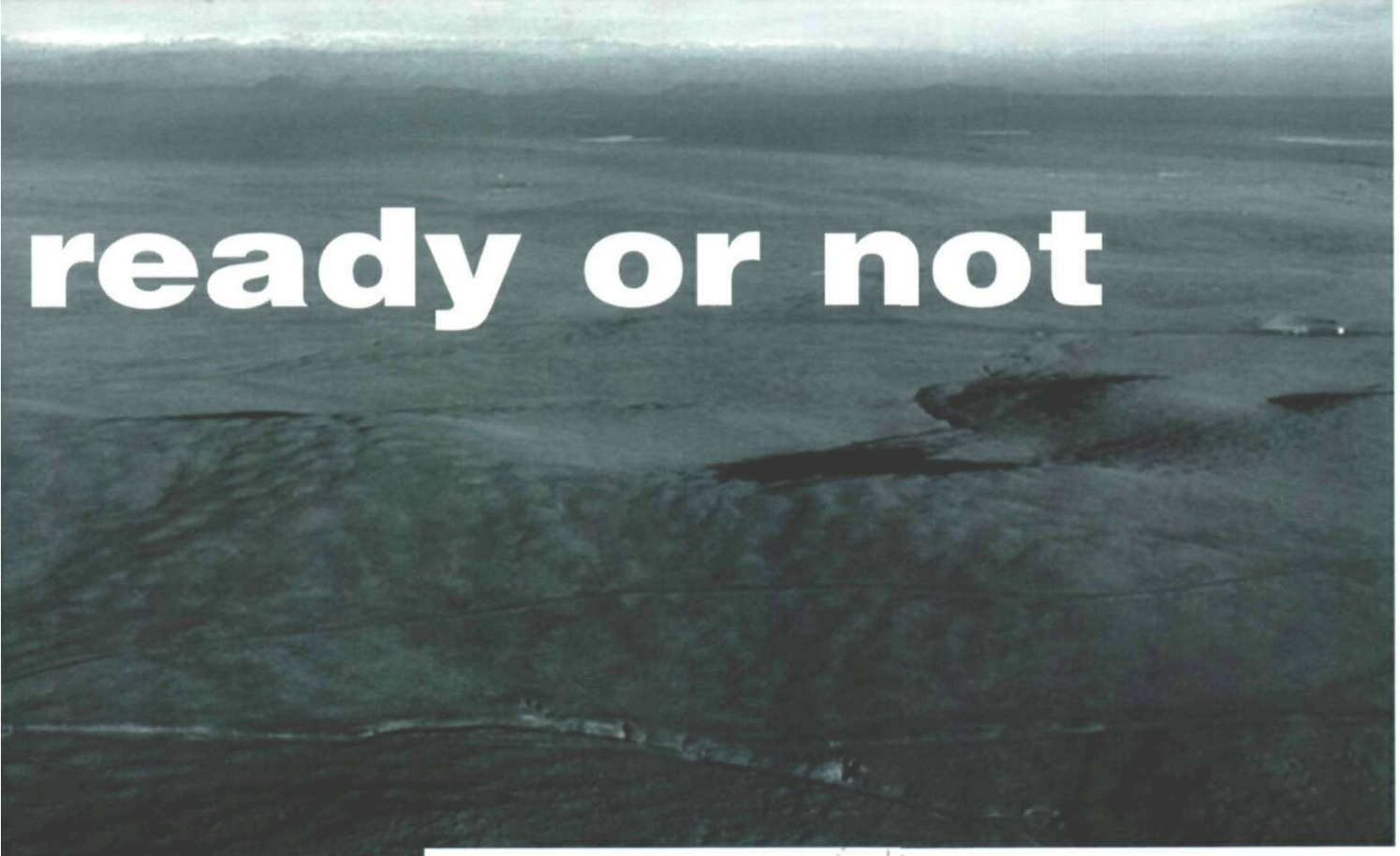
ready or not



Then he pledged to create a task force to expedite federal environmental review of campus development.

Gore's visit was gratifying for both Condit and Bustamante, who have pushed hard for speedy construction of the Merced campus. In fact, Gore's visit came only three weeks after a UC Regents meeting in which Bustamante pressed University of California officials to start sooner rather than later. Concerned that compliance with California's environmental laws would delay things, he suggested he would back special legislation, if necessary, to expedite environmental review.

Look out, fairy shrimp

But it's ironic that Gore — the likely "smart growth" candidate for president next year — is willing to use his influence to hasten environmental review of the Merced campus. The 17-square-mile tract of land outside Merced where the campus will be built is one of the Valley's most environmentally sensitive locations. The campus and a proposed "university community" surrounding it would

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rise on the western edge of "probably the largest unfragmented vernal pool grassland environment left anywhere in the world," notes Steven Johnson, director of stewardship and science for The Nature Conservancy's California office.

Vernal pools — small depressions in the earth that become wetlands during the rainy season — are the Valley's largest environmental resource and its largest environmental headache. They usually provide habitat for fairy shrimp, which is listed as an endangered species under federal law.

And the choices confronting UC and Merced officials in planning the campus show how difficult it will be to balance new development, farmland, and natural resources as the Valley's population growth accelerates during the next several decades. University planners chose unirrigated rangeland — not prime farmland — for the campus and the surrounding community, which could together contain more than 50,000 people. But trying to minimize impacts on vernal pools has pushed growth to the eastern edge of the property — far from the City of Merced's existing urban infrastructure.

Already, both Merced County and the City of Merced have altered their urban growth designations to accommodate this new university community.

First in 30 years

Yet putting the campus so far to the east could increase the cost of infrastructure and threaten prime farmland next to Merced and the campus with suburban sprawl. "The implications go far beyond Merced County or the San Joaquin Valley or even the state, as agricultural production in this valley is so important to the nation," says Marsh Pitman, local Sierra Club conservation chair.

UC-Merced will be built on two adjacent tracts of land near Lake Yosemite, six miles northeast of Merced — a location UC Regents chose in 1995 over competing "greenfield" sites in Madera and Fresno counties. The Lake Yosemite site's relative proximity to urban areas, the availability of water, and the location in depressed Merced County worked in its favor — as did the willingness of the property owners to donate 2,000 acres to UC for the campus itself. The campus has become a major symbol of hope in Merced, where, without UC, local planners otherwise expect a doubling of the population during the next 20 years with little prospect for high-paying jobs.

UC-Merced will be the first University of California campus built from scratch in more than 30 years — meaning it will be the first new campus subject to the California Environmental Quality Act, the federal Endangered Species Act, and a whole raft of other environmental laws that have come to play an important role in shaping California's urban growth patterns.

UC has gained experience in dealing with CEQA and other environmental laws in recent years, largely as the result of hard-fought battles over "long-range development plans" to allow expansion of Berkeley, Davis, UCLA and other campuses. "I really want to get away from any thoughts that we want to get around the system, because that is not our strategy," says Roger Samuelsen, UC-Merced's chief of staff and director of administration. "Our approach is to work within the regulatory environment and go about this in the most responsible, environmentally sensitive, and economical way." UC-Merced already has established "green" credentials by creating the Sierra Nevada Research Institute, which will tie to Yosemite, Kings Canyon and Sequoia national parks, and plans to incorporate nearby wetlands into academic programs.

Fast track tricky

But to stay on schedule — the campus is supposed to begin classes for 5,000 students in the fall of 2005 — UC will have to submit to fast-track planning and environmental review over the next two years. And that may be tricky. For the past year, planning has been shaped by a group of "stakeholders," including UC, the city and county of Merced, the Merced Irrigation District, and the two trusts that own the land. (The Virginia Smith Trust and the Cyril Smith Trust, educational charities that provide scholarships to high school students in Merced and college students at Marquette University, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, own different pieces of the 10,400-acre tract that comprises the campus site and the larger community.)

After a year of work, this planning group settled on fundamental issues. Their concept plan calls for a "core campus" on 200 acres on the eastern edge of the site, surrounded by an ancillary campus of 1,800 acres that would accommodate up to 25,000 students and 6,600 faculty and staff members.

West and south of the campus would be a university community with 31,500 residents and 8,500 jobs, covering another 3,000 acres. That would leave 5,400 acres — about half the site of the whole campus and community — for open space, parks and environmental mitigation. "It has been truly collaborative in the best sense of that word," says Trudis Heinecke, UC's director of physical planning. "The county, the city and the water district, for that matter, have very high-quality planning staff.... I think we all worked very hard at making it work."

Now, Merced County is moving forward on a "specific plan" for the private areas, while UC is creating a long-range development plan for the campus itself. But two major issues remain. The first is how to relate the project effectively to the City of Merced without creating suburban sprawl in the rich farming areas nearby. The second is how to create an environmental mitigation plan — especially for the vernal pools — that will meet both state and federal muster.

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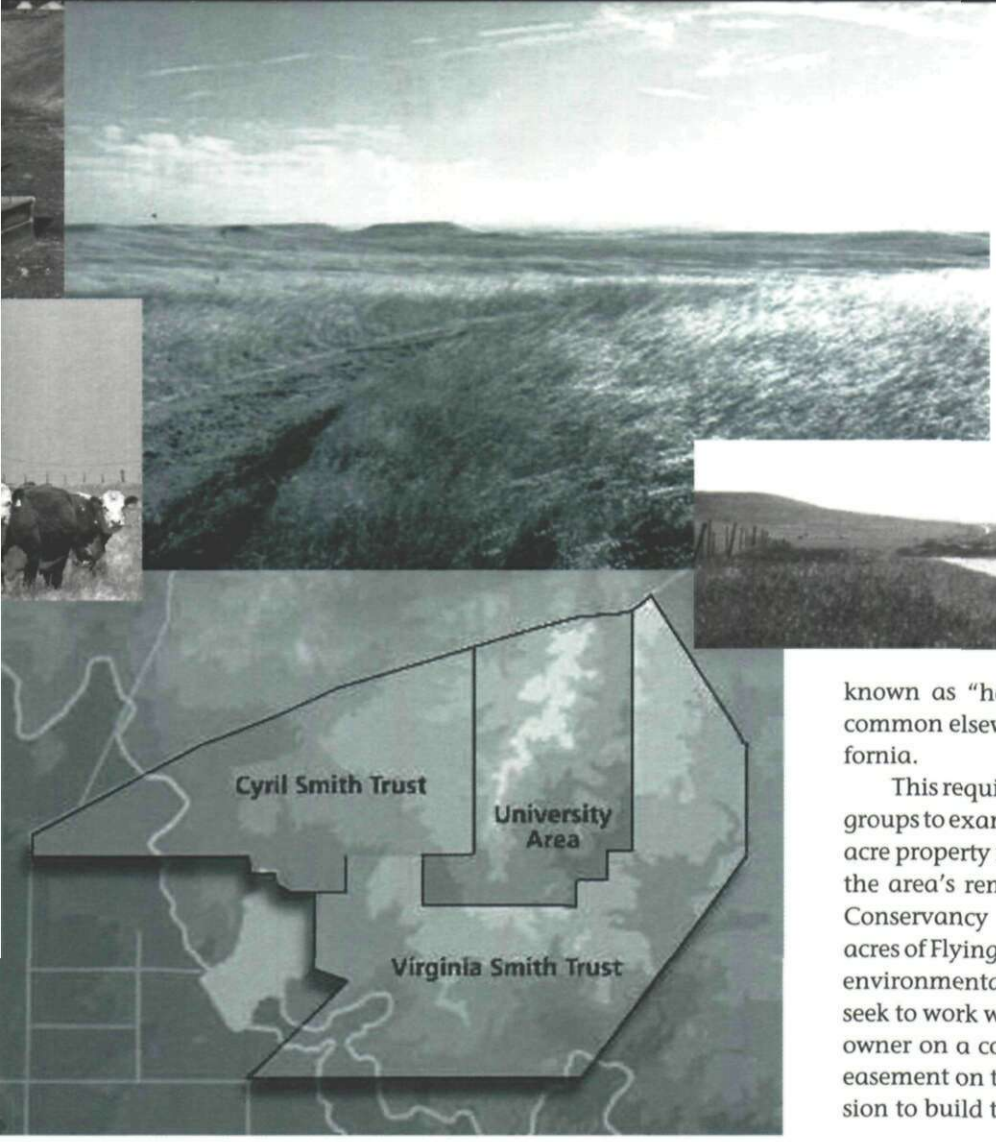

A suburban blob?

Having upped its own population projections to accommodate plans for the campus, the city clearly has its eye on annexing at least part of the developing community. (Indeed, Merced's "sphere of influence" boundary — covering the area the city is likely to annex sooner or later — reaches out dramatically to grab the campus.) Yet the county and local environmental groups are concerned about making this connection in a way that does not create an auto-oriented suburban blob in the middle.

Merced County Planning Director Robert E. Smith says the county is trying to create regulatory mechanisms to ensure the county can resist "potentially incompatible speculative proposals" in the corridor between the city and the campus. And Samuelsen says the university will work with the county to create open-space corridors that will prevent sprawl. "Growth-inducement is a major concern for us," he concedes. The environmental issues are likely to be even more difficult to overcome. The presence of vernal pools means that the university must deal not only with CEQA — a process UC can somewhat control — but will have to obtain wetland fill permits from the Army Corps of Engineers and special "incidental take" permits from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which administers the Endangered Species Act.

"We do not want to cut corners in this process," says Samuelsen. But the process of obtaining federal permits could be time-consuming. Under the Endangered Species Act, the Fish & Wildlife Service can issue "take" permits — allowing the university to destroy vernal pools — only if UC prepares a broad-ranging plan for preservation of vernal pools in Merced County that will benefit the fairy shrimp in the long run. Such plans, known as "habitat conservation plans," have become common elsewhere in the state, especially Southern California.

This requirement has led both UC and environmental groups to examine the adjacent Flying M Ranch, a 13,500-acre property in private ownership that contains much of the area's remaining stock of vernal pools. The Nature Conservancy owns a conservation easement on 5,000 acres of Flying M, but the rest is theoretically vulnerable to environmental degradation. In all probability, UC will seek to work with The Nature Conservancy and the landowner on a conservation plan that would lock down an easement on the rest of Flying M in exchange for permission to build the campus and the adjacent community.

Wetlands: pop. 35,000

The Nature Conservancy's Johnson said it is possible to plan a fully environmentally integrated campus. "Sure, it's a wetlands site," Johnson said. "But, on the other hand, if you were going to build a new town for 35,000 people anywhere in the state, you would be hard-pressed to find a site without environmental constraints." The question is whether a deal can be put together quickly enough to maintain the current timetable. The Fish & Wildlife Service seldom issues permits quickly when the environmental stakes are high.

While mainstream environmentalists believe UC has good intentions, the political pressure to build the campus quickly is strong, and that urge could conflict with typical project review timelines. But developers who routinely wait years for regulatory approval do not have the vice president and lieutenant governor doing their bidding. UC Merced planners may already be providing a case study for future environmental science students.

William Fulton is editor and publisher of California Planning & Development Report, *a statewide newsletter based in Ventura, and the author of "California, Land and Legacy," published by Westcliffe Publishers in 1998. Paul Shigley is managing editor of* CP&DR.

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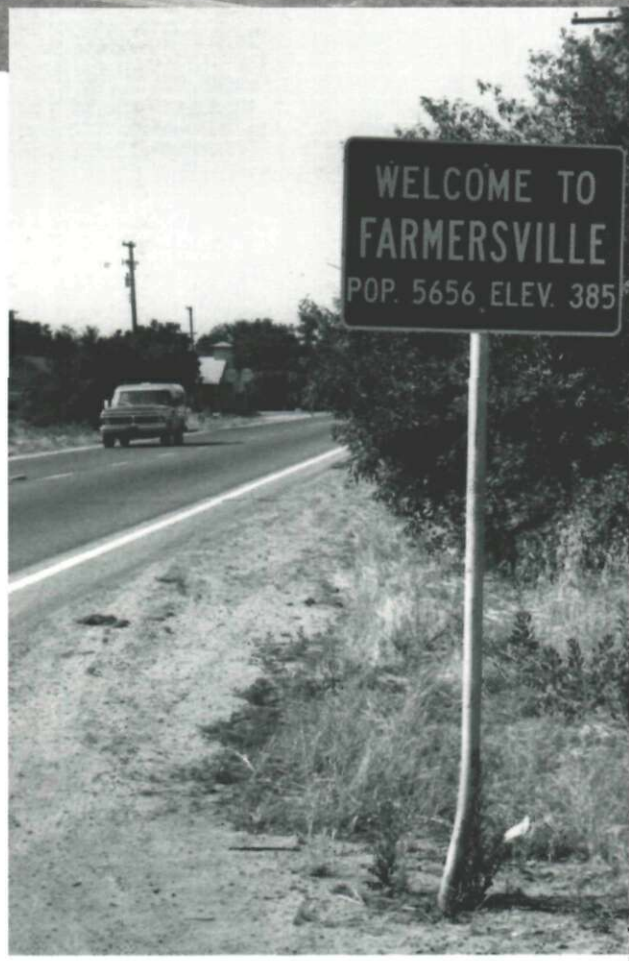
Preserving th Valley's farm



Efforts to save the small family farm in ag-rich San Joaquin Valley encompass everything from providing advice and tutoring to Hmong refugees to running a youth-targeted publicity campaign on how grains and veggies are grown for pizzas.

By Cynthia H. Craft

Maybe someday, the doomsday scenarios go, California's Central Valley will stand stripped of its stoic armies of orchards, its orderly platoons of row crops, its scattered battalions of bent field-pickers and its lumbering squadrons of large farm machinery.

Maybe someday, in place of farmland, landscapes of asphalt will sprout, foliated with more commercial signage than the eye can absorb, with row upon row of uniform tract-house rooftops filling vistas where once the rule of agriculture reigned.

By then, one occupation of the Valley will have ended and ceded territory to its rival.

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e land

Impossible, you say? Only when sun-baked Fresno freezes over would Big Ag retreat from this, the nation's salad bowl, the barren basin it so miraculously conquered just decades ago with — *abracadabra!* — magically imported water and improbably cheap labor?

It's in the cards, warn planners and preservationists. And so emerge the scare tactics — whatever it takes to get folks to sit up and take notice before it's too late. Witness the American Farmland Trust, the non-profit land preservation outfit contending that, each minute, the United States loses another two acres of ag land to bulldozers leveling fields in the name of progress and development. The loss is dramatized at the

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organization's website, *www.farmland.org* by a constantly updating ticker that tallies up paved-over acreage by the second as if it were the latest Lotto jackpot.

The farmland trust ranks California's Central Valley as the single most threatened agricultural region in the United States, placing it number one on its Top Ten list of lands endangered by building and construction. Within this scenario, the most vulnerable subset is not the big grower with hundreds or thousands of acres, but the small farm — defined by the United States Department of Agriculture as one that grosses less than $250,000 a year, but in California, one that, on average, pulls in $75,000 to $100,000 a year.

Small farms gobbled up

Already, experts say, about 10 percent of ag land in the valley has fallen in with the march of sprawling development. In many cases the very towns built to serve the agriculture economy decades ago are now multiplying and spreading over the lands that initially gave them life. In years to come, another 20 percent of Central Valley farmland is expected to disappear, as struggling farmers sell out, enticed by offers dangled by land speculators.

Small farms of 100 acres or less are getting gobbled up — either by developers or by larger farms trying to consolidate in order to survive in these perilous times of slender profit margins and abundant competition. Statistically, then, the large farms that do survive are getting bigger. In 1987, the size of the average farm in the Golden State was 368 acres. Ten years later, it was 374 acres, according to the United States Department of Agriculture. But there are fewer farms overall.

Farmers are aging, too — another red flag for ag in the Central Valley. Ten years ago, the USDA census pinpointed the age of the average California farmer at 53.6 years. By 1997 the average age crept up to 56.5 years. And then there's this intimidating bit of trivia: Of the 74,126 big and small farms operating in California in 1997, only 382 were owned by someone under age 25.

What this means, of course, is that the younger generation is rejecting farming as a way of life and career. "We are losing some small farmers each year. And their kids don't want to step up in line," says Richard Molinar, small farm advisor in Fresno County for the University of California Cooperative Extension program. "They see their parents working too hard. They see bigger money in computers and other fields. That's impacting our region here."

To combat this generational exodus, community leaders are trying to pump more pizazz and resources into 4-H Club programs in an effort to revive their popularity among youth. The Great Valley Center, a Modesto-based regional booster and growth-planning group, is firing off grants to the 4-H Club for trail-building in Kern County, to an ag education project for elementary schools in Kings County,

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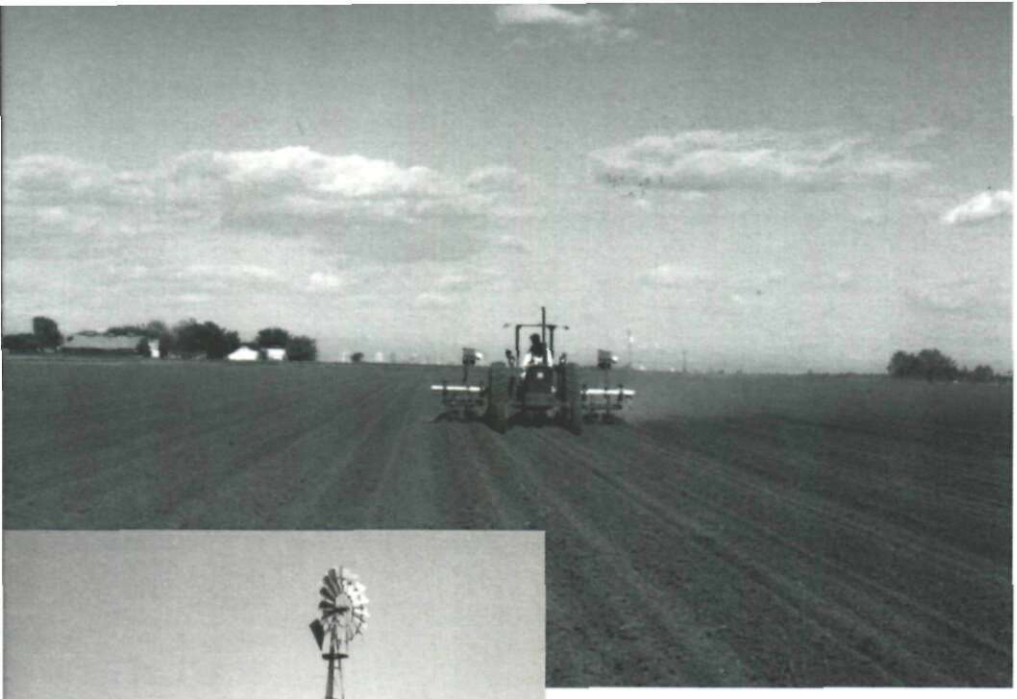


to the development of an educational map of the Delta as a deck of playing cards in San Joaquin County, and to a publicity project in Madera County that aims at the youth market by highlighting how farms produce veggies and grains used in pizza-making.

Hmong farmers

One hotspot that's drawn the attention and preservation efforts of the American Farmland Trust is the well-entrenched — yet still threatened — farmbelt of Southwest Fresno County, where field representative Greg Kirkpatrick notes, "We have a large number of farmers aging with no children wanting to take over. Small parcels are the ones immediately threatened."

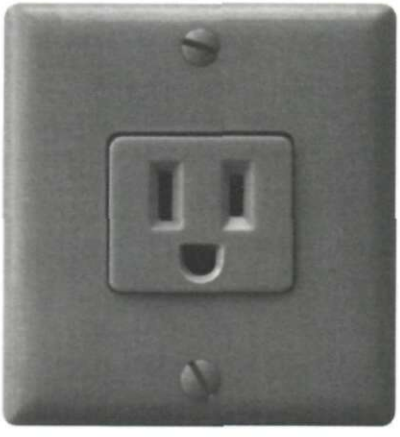
The farmland trust, working in concert with about two dozen other community and government groups in a Small Farm Resources Network to coordinate assistance to small farmers, purchased a 40-acre parcel abutted by housing in Fresno. Here, it hopes not only to block the immediate path of sprawl but to establish an "incubator" to teach small farmers how to make a decent living off the land. "We are trying to grow family farms," said Kirkpatrick. The trust hopes to see the spread of clusters of 20-acre or so parcels in "colonies," an experimental concept in agricultural land preservation that groups small farmers together so they may share marketing, processing and other support resources.

Of the roughly 3,500 small farm operations in Fresno County, about a third are run by Hmong refugee families, the largest bloc of constituents for aid, public assistance and local ag resource services. Coming from a backward culture under less-than-ideal circumstances — the Hmong were invited to resettle here by U.S. authorities who recruited their soldiers during the Vietnam War, leaving them vulnerable to political and military reprisal — families moved from Laos to Fresno unprepared for the vast language, cultural and technological differences. Many believed — mistakenly, as it turned out — that a willingness to work hard and commitment to take on back-breaking field labor would alone guarantee their prosperity in California. Yet, 20 years after the first wave of Hmong immigrants arrived, the majority — 68 to 70 percent — still fall within the overlapping categories of farming the land and receiving public assistance, said Toulu Thao, the founder of the Hmong American Community, Inc. and a community builder for the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

"They wonder, 'Why are so many people working so hard and have to be so poor?'" said Thao. "And here we are living in the richest country in the world. What is the problem?"

Tutoring farmers

It turns out that the Central Valley's mediterranean basin, as fertile as it may be, is quite different from the soils of Laos, and that traditional methods that produced verdant crops in the homeland simply failed to yield the same results in and around Fresno. The Hmong needed help figuring out



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how to profit while trying to feed families of six, eight, ten on the proceeds from raising Asian specialty vegetables such as bitter melon, lemon grass or *moqua,* a fuzzy little squash. So it is that, just as the market appears to be craving more natural-grown produce, the Hmong are being awakened to the need to use some pesticides and adopt more mechanized methods.

Of the approximately 1,000 small farmers in Fresno County that descend from other minority groups, a good portion are Latinos starting their own businesses after picking crops for large-operation growers. All need help positioning their products, says Molinar, in an ever-changing market often altered by the dynamics of foreign competition and discount pricing by large corporate concerns. Helping the small farmer, most of whom only lease the land they someday hope to own, is like putting up a buffer against sprawling suburban development and spreading farm consolidation.

"The small farmer problem is really scary, a sad situation," said Gloria Palacios, a former operator of a small farm in Fresno for 20 years. "A lot of the large agribusinesses are acquiring more and more land. They don't have too much interest in preserving the quality of life."

In Fresno, Palacios is heading up the United States Department of Agriculture's National Center for Excellence and Multiethnic Small Farm and Community Development, one of five such centers established nationwide in response to legal challenges by African-American farmers denied access to the USDA's taxpayer-funded farmer assistance programs. Along with remedying the discriminatory patterns of the past, the goal is to aid small farmers — of all ethnic backgrounds — as they negotiate a maze of federal, state and local support programs intended to teach them business skills and buck up their finances.

Diverse heritage

Yet advocates such as Thao worry that, despite multi-pronged efforts to help small farmers — in Fresno, ranging from the American Farmland Trust's "incubator" vision, to Molinar's niche-market coaching, to Palacios' new gap-spanning access to government assistance — not enough is being done to aid those with the greatest role in directly preserving farmland and ensuring it stays productive. "The success of these efforts remains to be seen," Thao said, noting that, in Molinar, for example, Fresno County has provided but one advisor to reach 3,500 small farmers. "There's a lot more to do. I'd like to see some more collaboration."

Regardless of how the job gets done, all seem to concur on one point: The small-farm way of life — with its bedrock underpinning and support of rural towns 70 to 80 percent dependent on the farm economy, its key family values, its food production, even its contribution to the local landscape and its role in helping to keep suburban sprawl in check — is worth preserving, whether in the face of oncoming galloping growth or not.

"One thing about the small farms in southwest Fresno: There's a long history there, and it's our heritage," says Kirkpatrick, whose great-grandfather immigrated to the Central Valley to grow olives, and whose father today is a Sunkist orange grower. "Small farms represent a unique community of ethnic diversity that has, over time, absorbed wave after wave of immigrants — from Swiss, Danish, Germans and Mennonites, to the Dutch, Armenians, Nisei farmers and now Sikhs from India. All along there have been Hispanics, and now the Hmong. That's why it's important to save these parcels. This is the land that provides the opportunity."

Cynthia H. Craft is managing editor of the California Journal. *Comments may be sent to cindic@statenet.com.*

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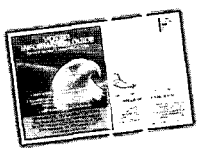

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"Migrant Mother": A Central Valley legacy

he stares out beyond the camera, pondering perhaps her bleak existence and her uncertain future. Her forehead is as furrowed as the fields she depends on to feed her young children.

The year was 1936, and America, especially the Central Valley, was gripped in the despair of the Great Depression. Her name was Florence Thompson, but most Americans came to know her simply as "Migrant Mother."

Her poignant photograph captured an era. She became an icon both for the plight of the Central Valley's migrant families struggling to escape the Dust Bowl and the country's simultaneous struggle to overcome the Depression.

Her image has hung in the Louvre Museum in Paris, graced the covers of countless books and magazines, appeared on a Merle Hag-

Her timeless image, captured in a 1936 photograph, spoke to the world of hardship and courage. To her family, it bequeathed a legacy that still runs deep.

gard country-western record album and last year was issued in black-and-white on a U.S. postage stamp. It is one of the most enduring images of this century.

Yet to her family, many of whom are still scattered throughout the Central Valley, she "was just Grandma," as one grandson, 46-year-old Tom Cleo Higgins, an Oakdale-area cattle rancher, recalls.

Florence Thompson, the mother of 10, is long gone, buried 16 years ago in a Modesto cemetery near the Tuolumne River. But she endures as an emblem, a reminder that even in California's rich Central Valley, there can be hunger, pain and poverty.

Her story, however, also is one of hope and determination, of the individuals and families who sank their roots deep into the Central Valley's topsoil and took hold.

One of those family members is Higgins, a sheep owner, cattle rancher and hay grower, who raised his family modestly and still lives 15 miles from the nearest town in a remote corner of the Central Valley northeast of Modesto known as "Little Ireland."

By Claudia Buck

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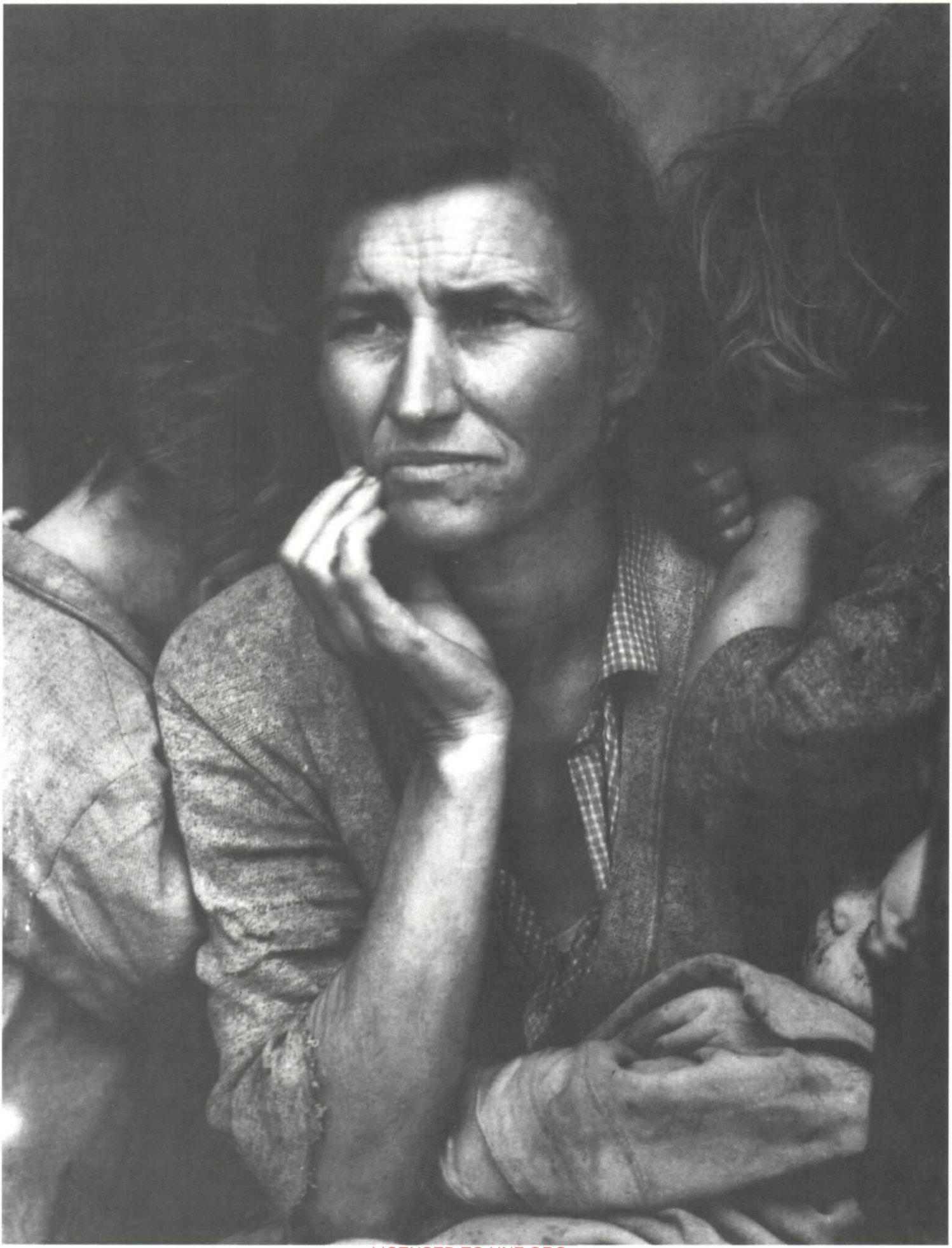

Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California, 1936. Courtesy of the Dorothea Lange Collection, The Oakland Museum, Gift of Paul S. Taylor

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A close-knit family

Another is Higgins' son and Thompson's great-grandson, Thomas (Tom) Clayton Higgins, who grew up a country boy but left with his father's blessing for the University of California, Berkeley, and larger horizons, becoming at 25 a political consultant and campaign manager working in the legislative capitals of Sacramento and Washingon, D.C.

For both these subsequent generations of California's "Migrant Mother," their Central Valley childhoods have indelibly shaped them. Although father and son took wildly divergent career paths, their link to the land speaks volumes about what it means to grow up in California's heartland.

Even at 25, the hard-charging younger Higgins says: "This is where my heart always has been and always will be."

For his father, being a Central Valley cowboy is all he ever wanted. This is a man who sings to his cattle, who will bolt out the door when a sheep gets stuck in the fence, who frequently has missed family get-togethers when a tractor breaks down or a cow gets sick. Devoted to his wife and two kids, he has acquired just what he wanted from life: a close-knit family, a wife who's still "the best thing that ever happened to me" and a life spent outdoors tending cattle, cutting hay, mending fences. Never mind that he doesn't own the land he tends or even the turn-of-the-century rambling house he's lived in for more than 20 years. He is as wedded to this landscape as if every dime he owns were plowed right into its grassy cover.

"It's all I've ever wanted. I like being out by myself, ever since I was a kid," he says wrapping his freckled hands around a coffee mug at his dining room table.

Pastures vs. politics

Even today, most of his childhood buddies remain in the area. The kid who shoes his horses is the son of a childhood pal. When it's time to brand calves, he calls on the men he grew up with. "All my friends are still on ranches today. Even my friends who work in town, still have an orchard at home."

Yet, it's not the life that he wanted for his children. Although he and his wife, Jennifer, consciously chose to live in the country, driving their kids into town for high school in Escalon and Oakdale, neither expected, or desired, that their kids would follow suit.

Sitting on a recent Sunday afternoon in a button-down shirt and Wrangler jeans, Higgins says life is good "but we know what poor is. There were years when I couldn't find a pair of pants I owned without both knees ripped out." The couple often went without so their children would not.

Their daughter, Janet, a criminology major at California State University, Fresno, aspires to become an FBI agent. Their son, armed with a political science degree from UC-Berkeley, has worked in the California Legislature and for a stream of Democratic candidates, from U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein to last year's gubernatorial hopeful Al Checchi to Congresswoman Lois Capps of Santa Barbara. He was Capps' deputy campaign manager in the 1998 June primary and managed Barry Gordon's race that November against U.S. Representative James Rogan.

Asked if he's disappointed that his two kids left the land, the senior Higgins doesn't hesitate a second. "Nope. Because it's still part of them. When Tom comes home, he puts on an old, ripped-up pair of Levis and heads down to the creek and he's like a little kid again. I think they'll both end up in the country. Even if they live in the city, they'll buy a piece of land somewhere."

Florence Thompson in Modesto, June 1979, with her th daughters (left to right) Katherine McIntosh, Ruby Sprague and Norma Rydlewski — the same children pictured in the "Migrant Mother" photograph. Photo tal in Norma's backyard by Bill Ganzel, "Dust Bowl Descer

A Central Valley childhood

For the younger Tom Higgins, that scenario seems highly likely. Even in the midst of an intense campaign, such as when he helped write policy position papers for political consultant Darry Sragow as part of Checchi's 1998 run for governor, Higgins would occasionally hop a plane home just to decompress.

The younger Higgins readily acknowledges that his childhood was atypical of his peers — his nearest friend lived five miles away, there was no daily newspaper delivery, even the TV reception was weak. Perhaps because of that lack of distractions, he says, "our bonds as a family are incredibly tight."

Growing up in the Central Valley meant 4-H projects, summer vacations spent at the Stanislaus County Fair showing their prized pigs, sheep and rabbits, driving the tractor with Dad, helping harvest the hay.

Yet they weren't isolated from the wider world. In junior high, Higgins remembers coming in for lunch after working the fields with his father and flipping on TV coverage of the Iran-Contra hearings. His 4-H club traveled to Washington, D.C., and New York City. But it was a field trip to Sacramento's Capitol with his 8th-grade class — all 17 of them — that crystallized for him what he wanted: politics, public service and political campaigns.

By high school, when he volunteered to work on then-Assemblyman Gary Condit's 1989 congressional campaign, walking precincts and stuffing envelopes, politics had become his passion. He even became a candidate

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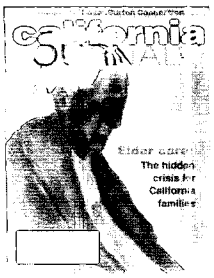

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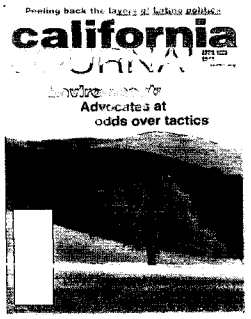

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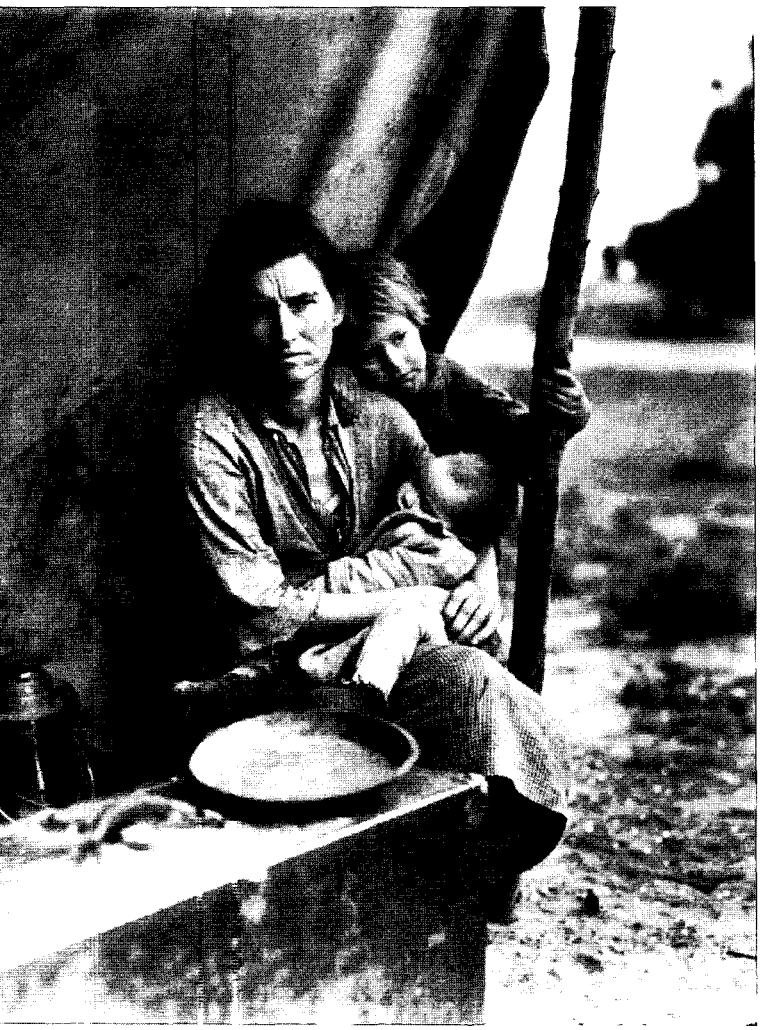

Migrant Mother (3), Nipomo, California, 1936. Courtesy of the Dorothea Lange Collection, The Oakland Museum, Gift of Paul S. Taylor

himself, winning a four-year term while still in college to the Valley Home Joint Union Elementary school board, a tiny district with 210 kids enrolled in grades K-8.

A reluctant celebrity

It was in one of that district's classrooms as a youngster that Higgins remembers running across his great-grandmother's picture in a textbook but being too shy to acknowledge the family connection to his friends.

Even today he's often reluctant to mention it, mainly because it seems so improbable to most people. Two years ago, Higgins was a staffer working in the office of Assemblyman Wally Knox (D-Los Angeles). A postcard of the Migrant Mother, sent to him by his fiancee, was propped up on his computer terminal when a Capitol lobbyist saw it and stopped. "He knew the photograph and stopped to talk about it. I rarely tell anyone of my connection but because he obviously was so awed by it I told him: 'She's my great-grandmother.' He didn't believe me."

As for that famous snapshot, his father remembers that Grandma "wanted no part of it. If she'd had her way, none of those pictures would have been taken. She was embarrassed by them."

While the Migrant Mother photograph made her a celebrity of sorts in later years, the life that Florence Thompson was living when the photo was taken was nothing to celebrate.

The family's saga began years ahead of the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression that drove hordes of white, middle-class families west to California, fleeing the economic and agricultural crises that gripped Wall Street and the Midwest.

Life was sweet... for a time

Florence and her first husband, Cleo Owens, actually preceded that migration when they arrived in California's Central Valley in 1922 with the first three of their six children. They came looking for work and found it in a sawmill in Porterville, where Cleo and his brothers and their families, who'd also come West, earned decent wages. When the mill burned down in 1927, it was a portent of things to come, but no one recognized it at the time. The families moved north to Merced Falls, on the eastern side of the Central Valley, just below the foothills.

For a time, life was complete. There was work in the sawmill, food on the table and children, lots of them. In September 1929, Florence gave birth to the fifth of her 10 children, a girl they named Ruby. A month later, some 3,000 miles away, another event occured that would ultimately seal the fate of the town and the Owens family.

As Robert Sprague, Florence's grandson-in-law, recalls in a memoir he wrote of her life: "The Wall Street Crash of 1929 was little noticed in Merced Falls; it's doubtful if anyone understood what it would mean to their town. As the Great Depression moved across the land, little would remain as it had been. Though the mills tried to hold on with small orders through 1938, for most of its workers, the end came in '31. Cleo was one of many to lose his job. There was no other work; all they could do was move on, to join that army of people working in the fields and orchards of California, the migrants."

The family's first stop was in Oroville, where they picked peaches along with Cleo's sisters and brothers. One evening, after coming home covered in downy peach fuzz, Cleo, who'd always been frail with scarred lungs from a childhood fever, felt ill and found it difficult to breath in the tiny house they all shared. With no money to spare for doctors or medicine, Cleo spent several days with a high fever, nursed by his wife and sisters, sleeping outside on the porch. On his last night, Florence spent the evening with him on the porch, his head in her lap. Towards morning, he asked for one of his sisters to sit with him. As Sprague recounts his death: "In the cool hours before sunrise he left, his breath so light that his sister never knew the moment. He was just 32 years old." Cleo was buried in an unmarked pauper's grave in Oroville. Florence was left with five mouths to feed and another baby on the way.

A family moves on

That same day, Cleo's siblings met to discuss how to divide up and raise his five children. Family legend has it that Florence demonstrated her fierce independence. According to Sprague's account, she thanked her sisters- and

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brothers-in-law: "I know what you want to do but it's not right and I'm not going to let you...I made a promise to Cleo to see his kids raised and by God I'm going to keep that promise."

And she did. For the next several years, she stayed in Oroville doing odd jobs, waiting for Cleo's brothers and their families to return each winter from crop-picking.

But by 1936, Florence and her children were also on the move, moving from one migrant camp to another, picking crops to stay alive. According to Sprague, "They stayed and worked in every town from Tehachapi to Redding. They remember well the school and government camp at Arvin, but such nice camps were rare. Florence counted herself lucky whenever she had a real wood floor under the tent."

The younger Tom Higgins followed his passion for politics.

The elder Tom Higgins outside the 1800s abandoned storefront across from his home in Eugene, California.

Jim Hill had joined the young family, acting as a husband to Florence and a father to her children. One morning in March 1936, the family's car, either overheated or missing a timing chain, coasted to the edge of a migrant camp underneath a group of trees near Nipomo, south of San Luis Obispo, along U.S. 101. The news that greeted their arrival was bleak: the crop of snowpeas sitting in the nearby field had frozen the night before. There would be no work and, until the family's car was repaired, they had no way to leave.

Jim and two of Florence's boys decided to walk to a town five miles away for car parts. While they were gone, history was made.

History in five frames

As Sprague tells it: "A shiny new car pulled into the entrance, stopped about 10 yards in front of Florence and a well-dressed woman got out with a camera. She started taking Florence's picture. With each picture, the woman would step closer. Florence thought to herself: 'Pay her no mind. The woman thinks I'm quaint and wants to take my picture.'"

The woman was Dorothea Lange, one of a handful of photographers paid by the Farm Security Administration in the 1930s to document the plight and conditions of migrant families. She approached Thompson, sitting weary and forlorn in a canvas lean-to, a baby at her breast and several toddlers clinging to her thin shoulders. Lange promised that Florence's name would never be used but that the photographs could help others in a similar plight.

The conversation apparently lasted only a matter of minutes. Only five frames were snapped before Lange climbed back into her car and drove away.

That might have been the end of it, except that the promise of anonymity was shortlived.

When the photograph was eventually published, it engendered a huge outpouring of concern and help for California's migrant families. The picture was endlessly reproduced, but because Lange did not jot down Florence Thompson's name, the true identity of Migrant Mother was known only to her family. On one occasion, one of Thompson's sons rushed home from his newspaper route after spotting his mother's picture in the paper, certain that a published photo meant his mother was dead.

But for the most part, there was no effort by Thompson to make herself known. After World War II, the family settled in Modesto. Florence had several more husbands and several more children. And always she was working, in restaurants and other small jobs.

An identity revealed

As her children grew up, they scattered like seed, but never flung themselves too far. Most stayed in the Central Valley, where they married, took jobs, bought homes, and raised children of their own.

"Migrant Mother's" identity remained unknown to most outsiders until 1978 when a *Modesto Bee* reporter, acting on a tip, knocked on her door. He found her somewhat resentful that her picture had been reproduced so many times in so many places. She was certain that Lange or others were making money off her personal story.

Later, however, her daughters believe she developed a certain pride in the photograph's existence and its place in history. In a 1979 interview with Nebraska writer and photographer Bill Ganzel, Florence described those lean years. "You couldn't get no work and what you could, it was

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very hard and cheap. I'd leave home before daylight and come home after dark — grapes, 'taters, peas, whatever I was doing. Barely made enough each day to buy groceries that night. I'd pick four or five hundred pounds of cotton every day. I didn't even weigh a hundred pounds. We just existed — we survived, let's put it that way."

Speaking of the fictional Joad family that John Steinbeck immortalized in "The Grapes of Wrath," who camped beneath a bridge in Bakersfield, Thompson told the writer that she spent time under that same bridge. "It was the same story. Didn't even have a tent then, just a ratty old quilt. I walked from what they'd call the Hoover camp at the bridge to way down on First Street to work in a restaurant for 50 cents a day and leftovers. They'd give me what was left over to take home, sometimes two water buckets full. I had six children to feed at that time."

"Tougher than whipped leather"

One of her daughters, Ruby Sprague, told Ganzel that, "Women, especially, would give to their children and they would do without. When we were growing up, if mother weighed 100 pounds, she was fat."

Her sacrifices were not lost on her children. The bonds they forged through their childhood remained lifelong. Higgins remembers throughout his childhood that whenever Florence called with a request, her grown sons, who lived in the Bay Area at the time, would "be on the road over here. If there was a problem, they'd show up on a Wednesday night, in the middle of winter. They'd get off work and drive all night to get here, help out, go back home and go to work the next day."

He says his aunts, Florence's daughters, grew up just like their mother. "Those women were tougher than whipped leather," says Higgins, chuckling at the memory. "They weren't mean but they were tough. They could outwork any man. There wasn't anything they couldn't do."

Although his grandmother never wanted to acknowledge her Indian ancestry, Florence and her mother were believed to be full-blooded Cherokee, and according to family legend, were descendants of Ned Christy, an Indian renegade outlaw who died in a shoot-out with a posse.

Higgins vividly remembers his Indian great-grandmother — Florence's mother. "She had this snow-white hair that she wore in two long braids, Indian style. She would sit at the table and chew Bull Durham twist tobacco. She would chew and chew on that tobacco and then she'd let it dry and put it in her corncob pipe and smoke it. I was just a little guy, but I'll never forget that."

Defined by the Depression

His grandmother, he recalls, used snuff most of her life, Garrett snuff that she kept in her purse in a tiny gold pill bottle. Higgins, a tobacco chewer himself, recalls as a 20-year-old how he once tried a pinch of his Grandma's snuff and nearly passed out.

But all her vices were relatively tame. Thompson liked an occasional trip to Lake Tahoe's slot machines and a Sunday afternoon beer or two. Higgins remembers that Grandma used to arrive for a Sunday visit with two "Olyies" (Olympia beers) tucked into her purse. That was her limit.

Like many who survived the Depression, Thompson was shaped by her experience. Ganzel remembers that her daughters mentioned wanting to buy their mother a tract house in Modesto's suburbs, but she had no interest in leaving her mobile home. "What that said to me, symbolically," says Ganzel today from his Nebraska Public Television office in Lincoln, "was that she literally wanted wheels under her feet so that if the hard times ever came back, she could just pick up and go."

Ganzel met her in the late 1970s, when he was travelling the country photographing and researching the stories of Dust Bowl survivors for his book, *Dust Bowl Descent*. When it came time to take her photograph, Ganzel recalls, Thompson sat leaning against her arm, her lined face tucked up against her hand. Just as she was captured on film by Dorthea Lange some 40 years earlier, the same pose emerged, naturally and unasked, in front of his camera lens.

That image was so indelibly etched into the nation's psyche that when Thompson was stricken with cancer in 1983, the news drew media attention from around the country. Too ill for surgery, she moved into the home of a son in Scotts Valley, near Santa Cruz. When her family made a public appeal for funds to help pay for her round-the-clock care, cards and contributions poured in from around the country.

"She's the reason"

She died Sept. 16, 1983, at age 79. At her funeral in Modesto, more than 300 family members and friends crowded the tiny funeral home. Then-President Ronald Reagan sent his condolences; the *New York Times* sent a reporter. Her obituary listed 10 children, 39 grandchildren, 74 great-grandchildren and seven great-great-grandchildren.

Because there were always so many kids running around at family gatherings, neither Higgins interviewed for this story recalls that any of them ever had much in the way of one-on-one time with the family's legendary matriarch.

But the message that traveled down through the generations was timeless: Family is forever and hard work is the ticket to success.

Whether it's harvesting hay in the field or harvesting votes in the suburbs, it's a family legacy that has been absorbed. "People ask me why I got into politics," said Higgins, "and I say: 'She's the reason.'"

He believes it is government's role to ensure that the kind of hardships she endured can't recur. At the same time, he is terribly proud of his great-grandmother's perseverance and self-reliance: "It sounds corny but she worked her entire life and proved that cliche that no one owes you. She and her generation came to symbolize that spirit of American can-do-ism."

Claudia Buck is associate editor of the California Journal. *Comments on this story may be sent to editor@statenet.com.*

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Voices of the

As refugees from San Francisco and the Silicon Valley in the north, and the Los Angeles Basin in the south, pour into the Central Valley in search of affordable housing and jobs, the bucolic character of California's "farm belt" could change forever. Local decision-makers are taking stock of the situation and offer some insights on the future of their fragile, yet critical region.

By Kathleen Les

When people first poured into California, they elbowed in along the coast, especially after the madness sparked by the Gold Rush had evolved into a quiet stream of immigration. First, it was San Francisco and Oakland — epicenters of 19th century growth. Then came Los Angeles, sprawling ever eastward in the heady years before and after World War II. Orange County and San Diego took their turns in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1980s and 1990s, it was San Jose and the burgeoning Silicon Valley south of San Francisco.

But there comes a point when the coastline holds no more room for elbowing, and the price of buying-in outstrips the ability of ordinary folk to capture the dream of home ownership. Then, the population begins to pour inland. Farthest south, people sought out the once quiet hideaways of the Inland Empire.

In the north, say demographers, the population will descend on the Central Valley.

The numbers are daunting.

If forecasts prove accurate, as many as 10 million more residents — in magnitude, equal to another Los Angeles County — could fill the Valley floor over the next 40 years. If true, it will triple the population of the 18 counties that

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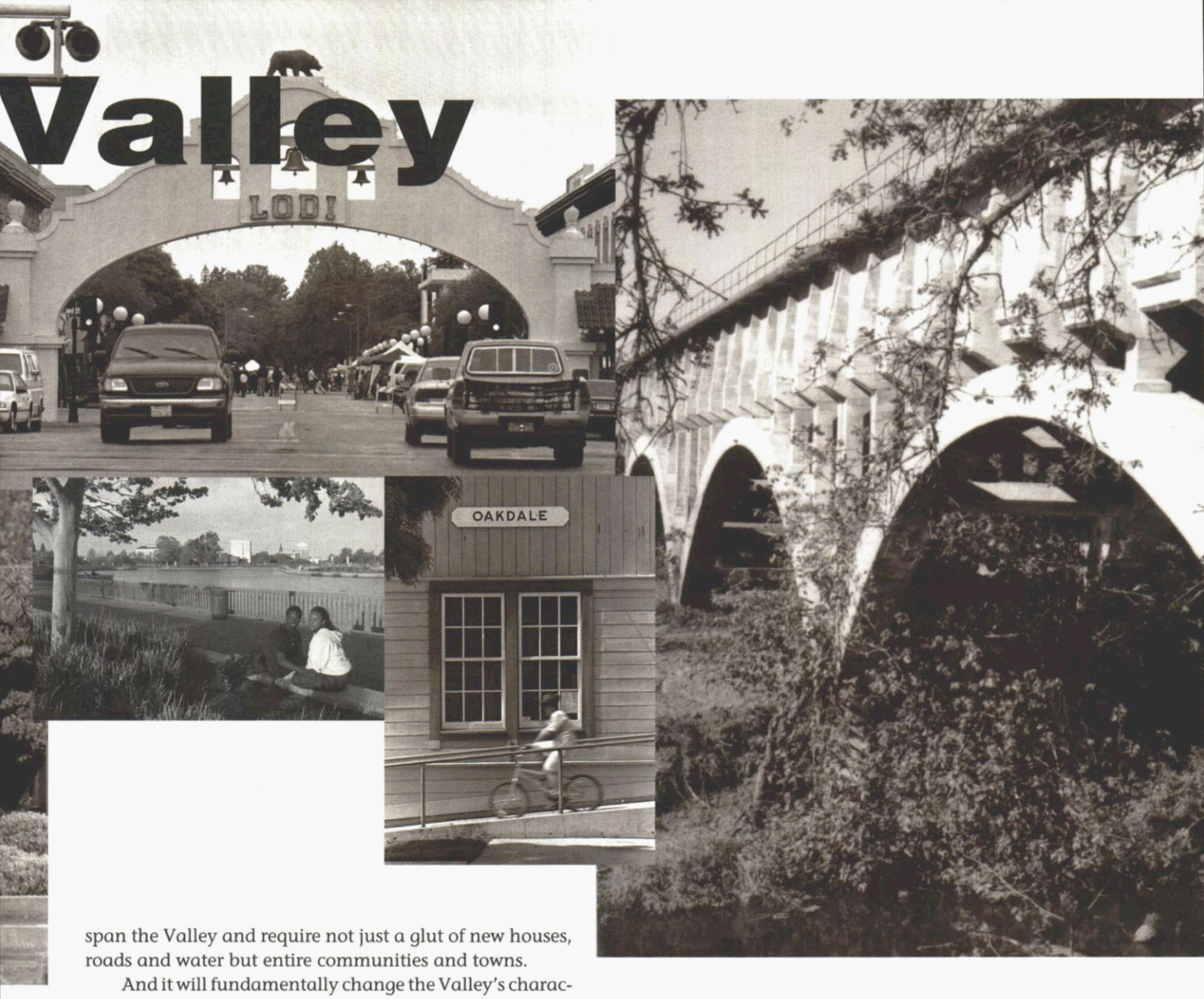
Valley



span the Valley and require not just a glut of new houses, roads and water but entire communities and towns.

And it will fundamentally change the Valley's character.

In its 400-mile stretch from the tiny town of Arvin in the south to Redding in the north, the Central Valley still is mostly about agriculture, and as such, it is home to some of the nation's most productive farmland. But change already has crept onto the landscape. The population is swelling, as anyone who has driven through Tracy or Elk Grove of late will attest.

The fear is that the great Central Valley will one day be reduced to endless miles of tract housing and that its destiny will resemble that of Los Angeles and Riverside, where orange groves gave way to sprawl and the innate character of a region was forever buried beneath a sea of concrete and steel.

The time to address the Valley's fate already is upon its decision-makers, now faced with planning for a future that seems all too inevitable. How do they view that future? What do those in a position to help chart the Valley's course feel can be done? Here are the perspectives of a few of those decision-makers.

Pete Parra
Supervisor, Kern County

The Central Valley promise brought young Pete Parra and his family from Texas to Bakersfield in 1942. To his sharecropper father, that promise meant good-paying work and decent housing for his family of 12 children. But that promise was slow to unfold for the Parra family. For three years, they lived in an old army tent before buying a small house in a Mexican barrio. Still, each year the family left home between May and October to crisscross the state picking crops to earn a meager living. The transient lifestyle meant Parra, the youngest of a large family, was the only child to finish high school and go to college.

Despite the hardships, many more Latinos continued to migrate to the Central Valley in pursuit of farm labor,

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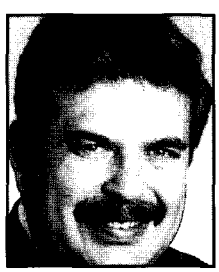
giving rise to a major demographic change beginning in the 1970s. But lack of full-time work and menial wages saw these immigrants, too, fall short of the promise that lured them to one of the world's most productive agricultural regions.

With higher than average poverty rates throughout the Valley, particularly among farm workers, Parra is not optimistic that simply building new homes and shopping centers will provide economic opportunities for all valley residents. Only in the last few years, since Parra was elected to the Kern County Board of Supervisors, has a planning commission been established to evaluate the impacts of who really benefits when agricultural land is converted to residential planned communities. "In order to talk about sensible growth, the first thing we have to do is look at the tremendous needs of the existing population," maintains Parra.

With unemployment running as high as 40 percent in some of the Valley's small rural towns, Parra worries that many will be left behind if growth encompasses only a narrow economic scope. "My charge and challenge is to bring [the economically disadvantaged] into the discussion so we can hear their vision," he said.

Parra sees families doubling and tripling up to afford homes priced at $70,000. "The days of saying our county will deal with its own problems are gone," he insists. Now Parra looks toward regional planning as the way to gain the attention of the Sacramento political powers who can provide economic help. To that end he has started bringing together county supervisors from throughout the Central Valley to work toward consensus on jobs, growth and transportation — so all valley residents can participate in the evolving economy.

"I still call it the Central Valley promise," said Parra. "But so far, the promise has not been kept."



Juan Arambula
Supervisor, Fresno County

Growing up in the small Tulare County town of Pixley, Juan Arambula fondly remembers working in the fields and lifting his eyes to the east at the Sierra Nevadas and pivoting slightly to the west to glance at the Coast Range. Now those vistas, he says, are rare except from much closer vantage points.

Harvard-educated, Arambula went on to earn post-graduate degrees that led him into teaching, radio-station management and eventually to the law. Always, he returned to the valley, first to Delano where he spent his high school years and eventually to Fresno where he has raised his own family in a tree-lined downtown neighborhood.

Arambula has watched friends and neighbors forsake the downtown for the suburbs and is concerned about flight from the inner city. "Those of us who choose to stay, and dig in our heels to do battle where we are, feel the growth on the outskirts is sapping the energy and vitality of older, established areas," he said.

Arambula points to studies showing new home owners bear only a portion of the true cost of developing the fringe, and until they do, he doubts the push for outward growth will be reversed. But if comparable financial incentives encouraged home ownership in the core, Arambula is sure, young families would respond. "If the rules of the game change, I believe those same folks would just as soon stay closer to work and live in mixed communities," he said.

Arambula has been instrumental in developing revenue-sharing agreements between Fresno County and 15 cities to help steer new growth toward existing town centers in exchange for splitting tax dollars generated by new homes. But many of these same cities already have grown to the outer reaches of their spheres of influence — the point at which the cities themselves decide the character of development. Beyond that point, someone else — usually the county — controls the growth and calls the shots. Arambula worries that the pressure to expand will continue to weaken the urban core. "We should be making decisions about what kind of communities we want 20 years from now," and not simply assuming major growth as a given, he insists.

The population surge of the last 10 years has Arambula concerned about the spiraling number of people residing where farmers once tilled prime farmland. "It's clear that we've gone through a lot of rapid change and that has caused a feeling among us that things are moving too quickly, that we are not in charge of our own destiny," he said.

Carol Whiteside
President, Great Valley Center

When she founded the Great Valley Center in 1997, former Modesto Mayor Carol Whiteside sought to merge her two concerns about the Valley's future. On one hand, she bemoaned the conversion of rich and scenic farmland to new subdivisions; on the other, she fully recognized the need to provide jobs.

Thirty years ago, when Whiteside and her husband left the Bay Area, it was clean air and serenity that brought them to Modesto. By the time she became mayor, Whiteside dealt firsthand with the problems of economic blight and saw clearly the need to improve the fortunes of those who did not catch the rising tide of affluence. At the same time, she never forgot the sadness she felt as a young mother, watching bulldozers not far from her home systematically mow down acres of almond and peach orchards to make way for new houses.

"I have a strong sense of inevitable change, but also a commitment to keep what's good and try to make this area successful in a way that Los Angeles and Orange County have not been," said Whiteside, adding that "we're building new houses, but not building a new economy."

Backed by major funding from the Hewlett Packard

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and Irvine foundations, the Great Valley Center channels resources — grants, expertise and networking — to local governments so that community leaders can be thoughtful and proactive about planning for growth. "The most important thing the Valley can do is get past incremental decision-making and focus on long-range impacts," offers Whiteside.

High on her agenda is positioning the Central Valley to compete in the global economy and creating a value-added business tier — food packaging, processing and production -- to the existing agricultural base. She also sees possibilities in a growing telecommunications sector and opportunities for careers based on remedying some of the Valley's environmental ills — particularly its poor air quality.

"What is happening in this region will have a major impact on the state and maybe a major impact on the food supply of our nation," Whiteside said. "A lot of us believe we have maybe five to 10 years to shape that impact. If we don't do it, the region is going to cost the state big time in social problems and environmental decline."

Carolyn Ratto
Mayor pro Tempore, City of Turlock

Eighteen years ago, when Carolyn Ratto and her husband left the Bay Area in search of a smaller community to raise their young family, they chose Turlock, a sunny farm town surrounded by acres of orchards. Now as mayor pro tem, Ratto sits at the helm of the city's impending growth.

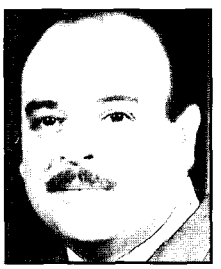
But without a road map of statewide goals to help guide the influx of perhaps 10 million more people, Ratto is nervous. "Agriculture has a value to our economy and to our autonomy as a nation," said Ratto, who feels strongly that leadership in Sacramento ought to be concerned about the loss of the very land used to feed the country.

As farmers increasingly have a hard time making ends meet, selling their land to home builders is more attractive. But in Turlock homes must sell for $250,000 to generate enough tax revenue to pay for city services needed by new residents. Ratto knows full well such a selling price excludes many local residents who earn far below the qualifying income for such homes.

And while Ratto is proud that her city has stiff criteria limiting growth on the northern boundary, Turlock officials have no control over what is done on adjacent, unincorporated lands controlled by the county. Ratto believes strongly in steering growth where it's wanted through financial incentives, but she wrestles with the city's need for tax dollars to accommodate the growing demands for parks, after-school child care and fire and safety services. And her optimism falters when it comes to her region's ability to contain growth in a way that enhances the economy, while striking a balance between farmland and open space.

"I do not see the state setting up any overarching goals," said Ratto. "I do not see them moving in the direction of incentives. I don't see them changing the revenue stream. And if none of that happens, I don't see the land being preserved anymore than it was in Southern California."

Having watched her "boomer" generation demand its personal rights in many arenas, Ratto thinks maybe now it's time to think about limits. "There is a growing sense that there is maybe a personal responsibility to community," she said. "We all have the idea that we want to do better for our kids. Now a lot of us are wondering what is really better for our children."



Cruz Bustamante
Lieutenant Governor

"I grew up in a place where there were miles and miles of miles and miles," Cruz Bustamante is fond of saying of the broad fields that endlessly roll toward the horizon in his boyhood town of San Joaquin in Fresno County.

Now Bustamante is in charge of finding solutions to California's aging and unmet infrastructure along those miles of still largely undeveloped stretches of Central Valley land. As co-chair of the Commission on Building for the 21st century, he will oversee a massive inventory of the state's schools, colleges, prisons, roads, water and transportation facilities and will be responsible for funding solutions to carry out what is expected to be the state's most ambitious new public-works building program in the last three decades.

And in deciding what those infrastructure needs are for the Central Valley, in particular, Bustamante will determine whether the underlying spine of public services and facilities will be planned to consolidate growth or whether rows of orchards and ground crops will be replaced with endless miles of strip development.

"I'm not anti-growth, but I am for figuring growth in a much smarter way," said Bustamante, who already is in touch with legislators in Oregon, hoping to learn from their successes and mistakes. "Clearly development toward the foothills and away from the flatter land with richer soils would make some sense," he offers. As a longtime Central Valley resident, Bustamante is well aware that water is the lifeblood for those whose livelihoods, jobs and agricultural productivity depend on imported water.

But with water demand growing, new sources are critical. "Until we figure out how to create more water, that's going to be a major growth problem," he said.

Bustamante thinks it might well be possible to develop another 20 percent of the valley, but with the need for buffer zones between residential communities and farmland, he is concerned that development rippling ever outward from cities will put even larger amounts of agricultural land out of commission.

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Bustamante holds out hope, however, that a high-speed rail system running up and down the Valley and other savvy transportation solutions will help avoid the kind of massive traffic congestion and poor air quality that has become synonymous with the Silicon Valley. "Smart growth can, in fact, be smart or it can just be a jingle that starts to rattle through the press and Legislature," without real meaning, he said.

Jeff Harris
Chief Executive Officer, BIA of San Joaquin Valley

Jeff Harris left the family farm in Porterville where he grew up, then returned home to be an advocate for the building industry. Sounds like a real turnabout until you realize Harris has in mind a future where urbanization grows in deference to — not in defiance of — the rich farmland that spreads across his stretch of the Central Valley.

As senior staff to the Building Industry Association of San Joaquin Valley — a branch that includes Fresno and Madera counties — Harris wants to ensure that if Fresno County's population triples according to projections, new communities are more compact than the suburbia of recent decades.

"Stopping growth is not an option," said Harris. "But if we plan to accommodate growth in the more urban settings, we can direct growth toward the lesser productive agricultural land."

To this end, Harris three years ago brought together a rare coalition of farm, preservation, business and development interests to fashion design principles for new communities that could be built at higher densities than is typical for the area. By upping densities from three to six units per acre, Harris and the Growth Alternatives Alliance maintain, Fresno County will stave off development of some 234,000 acres of the area's richest agricultural land that would otherwise be paved with homes and industrial parks.

All 15 Fresno County cities and the county itself have conceptually embraced the Alliance's vision for compact and walkable communities. "I'm very encouraged that maybe for the first time ever there is a high level of awareness by our elected leadership to consciously plan as efficiently as possible to accommodate the growth," said Harris.

But until these local governments actually incorporate the development principles — narrower streets, smaller residential lots and a reduction in parking — into local planning mandates to help reduce the land needed for growth, local officials are likely to continue approving sprawling new developments.

Buyers already have signaled a preference for smaller lots in more user-friendly settings, says Harris, who is pressing for incorporation of the design guidelines into area general plans. But he warns that most local decision-makers are still too willing to acquiesce to those who insist that bigger is better — both for the environment and for property values. "Higher property values do not necessarily come from larger lots," said Harris.

Paul Wenger
Second Vice President, California Farm Bureau Federation

Paul Wenger, third generation family farmer, daily tends to 600 acres of almond and peach orchards along with fields of row crops. Only a small portion of his farmland, however, is on the original 100 acres acquired by his grandfather in 1910, which the family still owns. Unlike the two generations before him, says Wenger, he farms much more land than he owns in order to support his family. And most of what he farms is land owned by soon-to-retire farmers on the urban fringe ripe for development.

The biggest deterrents to long-term agriculture usage, he contends, are the specter of capital gains and inheritance taxes. So, when developers come knocking with financial offers, farmers can't resist. "Where you see the most land transitioning out of farming is when farmers are retiring," said Wenger.

Without solid legal and economic provisions that protect the status of farmland, farmers are at the mercy of an economic system that values land less for agriculture than it does for development. "We have no real zoning for agriculture; that's a catch-all term for open space until it can be converted to a higher use," said Wenger.

Reduced water supplies, more farmland converted for habitat restoration and the encroachment of urbanization all take a toll on farmers' acreage. Even though the original Williamson Act — which provided for 10-year renewable contracts between farmers and the state to keep land in agricultural production in return for tax breaks — helped stem conversion of farmland tract homes, opt-out provisions made it relatively easy for farmers to give up farming when developers beckoned. The revised Williamson Act — expanded last year to extend contracts to 20 years and increase property tax deductions — may, says Wenger, keep farmers on their land longer.

But Wenger who at age 43 is part of a younger generation of farmers, favors going beyond the Williamson Act to forgive capital gains and inheritance taxes in trade for a long-term commitment to keep farmland in agricultural production. "If government is really serious about [preserving farmland], we would talk about purchasing development rights or conservation easements," he said.

Without incentives to sell land purely for its agricultural value, less and less land is finding its way into the hands of the next generation for farming, laments Wegner.

As a result, he says, "land is the commodity, not what's grown on it."

Kathleen Les is associate editor of the California Journal. *Comments on this story may be e-mailed to kathyl@statenet.com.*

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